Kasba

A Story of Hudson Bay

GEORGE · R · RAY

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KASBA

A Story of Hudson Bay

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(*White Partridge*)

A Story of Hudson Bay

BY

George R. Ray, M.P.P.

AUTHOR'S EDITION

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I HAVE always regarded the writing of prefaces to be, for the most part, work thrown away; nevertheless, I am tempted to prefix a few words to this novel, in the form of a note, in order to defend myself against charges which may possibly be made against me by the critics, and to which I may be unable to revert after they shall have been preferred. It may be said, in the first place, that all the characters in this story speak ordinary English, which I admit. The natural language of the natives is, of course, the tongue of their race, Chipewyan or Eskimo, as the case may be, but in order that the reader might understand it, a translation was necessary. Since this was the case, why not have the translation in good English, instead of in pigeon-English, which no one properly understands and which is misleading and equally untrue to life? Then, again, my description of Chesterfield Inlet may be found fault with, and with good reason, for I have written of trees where no trees exist. Chesterfield Inlet is in the barren lands, as most people know. But a wooded district was necessary to my plot, and in describing the country I have changed the topography to suit the requirements of my story. And now, as a last

word, I would assure my readers that the incidents in this novel, though they may appear untrue to life and far-fetched, are nevertheless mostly made up of my own personal experiences and properly authenticated stories of curious happenings to other people in these northern regions.—G. R. R.

"Here feel we but the penalty of Adam,
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say
This is no flattery: these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade me what I am."

—"*As You Like It*," *Act II., Sc. I.*

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KASBA

CHAPTER I.

AN UNPLEASANT INCIDENT.

It was a bright, bitter-cold day in the short days of winter. The sun shone forlornly upon the bleak, ice-bound shores of Hudson Bay, as if in despair at its utter inability to warm the intensely cold atmosphere, or change in the slightest degree the frozen face of nature. Limitless fields of dazzling whiteness stretched to the horizon on either hand; a tremendous expanse of turbulent ice-fields, of hills and ridges, of plains and dells; a great white world, apparently empty.

Over all was the silence of death; a silence of awful profundity, yet at the same time an indescribably beautiful revelation.

Near at hand a trapped Arctic fox lay dishevelled and bleeding, its little green eyes glittering evilly and watching with some apprehension the movements of an object which had sprung up, apparently from nowhere, to advance upon it with startling directness.

The object was Roy Thursby, an intrepid young officer of the Hudson's Bay Company, visiting his

"line" of traps; a big fellow of five-and-twenty, with muscles of iron; a clean-shaven face—a noble face that betrayed a high-minded nature; eyes that as a rule were hard, but could soften; and a heart that never quailed. He was dressed in moleskin trousers, a pair of long blue stroud leggings, a coat made of hairy-deerskin (that is to say, deerskin dressed on the one side only), with a hood edged with fur, a l'Assumption belt that encircled his waist, and large deerskin moccasins, under which he undoubtedly wore at least two pairs of hairy-deerskin socks. Mittens of dressed deerskin were suspended from his shoulders by a worsted cord, and a fur cap with earpieces completed his costume. He wore snowshoes and carried a hunting-bag across his back and a rifle over his shoulder.

Over the undulating plain he came, pausing occasionally, diverging rarely, and ever nearer.

At length there was the sound of crunching snow, the swish of snowshoes; a short, stifled bark, and a white, furry, inanimate thing lay on the snow.

Without doffing his mitts Roy reset the trap. It was a steel trap, destitute of teeth, with two springs. The jaws when spread out flat were exactly on a level with the snow. He hid the chain and brushed a thin layer of snow on top of the trap. A few scraps of fish were scattered about for bait and the whole carefully smoothed over, so that it was almost impossible to tell that anything was there.

Then he straightened himself. The air had needles in it, and he readjusted the hood of his hairy

coat and tightened the wide ribbed belt around his waist.

Slipping the fox into his bag, he reached for his axe and gun, and with the long, even strides of one who could never tire, continued his "rounds," pausing now and then to "trim" a trap when nothing was in it, or killing an animal when caught and dropping it into his trapping-bag.

As he pressed on, his keen eyes, ever alert, caught a glimpse of a small dark blot moving along the face of a ridge of rocks in the foreground. He paused in his stride to scrutinize the moving object; then, apparently satisfied, he resumed his tramp.

Yowl, yowl; kum-pack, kum-pack—ptarmigan ran uneasily together in an adjacent clump of willows. Whir-r-r, and a flock flew up at his very feet. Other flocks followed on the right and left of him, but he heeded them not, for his thoughts were on the "packet." Somewhere in the wilderness of snow and ice to the south, two men and a train of dogs were laboring and straining every nerve to reach Fort Future. Of this the Company's hard and fast regulations made him cognizant: but where were they? Already they were several days overdue. What could have happened to detain them? Would they reach the Fort that day? These and like questions occupied his mind.

Soon he was winding his way up a gully in the ridge of rocks, and right before him was the object he had previously descried. As he drew near, it took on the form of an Indian girl, a young and

beautiful Chipewyan of about eighteen summers. She wore a blanket-skirt, very short as to length; a pair of red stroud leggings, beadwork moccasins and a thick woollen shawl, which ordinarily muffled the head and face but had now slipped back, leaving them exposed to view. She was a Chipewyan, but had scarcely a feature like them.

Her face was exquisitely moulded, and of a rich golden brown; her cheeks of coral red; her eyes large, dark and liquid, very strongly marked brows and long, thick lashes; her mouth was small and expressive, with very beautiful teeth. Her hair was neatly braided, crossed at the back of the head and tied on either side with a piece of narrow ribbon. She turned as he approached, and, dropping a bundle of short sticks and an axe, stood with heightened color and a pretty, embarrassed look on her finely cut features, waiting for him to come up.

With eyes intent upon the trader, the girl was quite oblivious of the presence of the middle-aged man of unprepossessing appearance, who had been skulking behind her for some time. Perceiving her preoccupation, he now approached her with a stealthy tread. In a flash he leaped from the background and caught her in his arms, drew her to him with a force she could not resist, and kissed her.

He was about to repeat this, when she gaspingly cried out.

There was an answering shout, the sound of someone running, a voice that imparted courage, crying, "I am here, Kasba!" and suddenly she was wrested

from the man's clutches and he was sent violently to the snow.

Palpitating with fear, the girl crouched down, hiding her face in her hands.

Roy stood breathing sharply, waiting for the man to rise. "By heaven, Broom," he thundered, in a wrath that was terrible, "this is too much! I will not stand this!"

Broom picked himself up. Instinctively his hand felt for his revolver; he evidently had no scruples against attacking an unarmed man (when Roy rushed to Kasba's assistance he had dropped his gun and it lay some few yards away), and inwardly he cursed himself for not having the weapon upon his person. "Curse you," he cried hoarsely, a paroxysm of rage almost preventing the utterance. "I'll kill you for that!" and, roaring like a wild beast, he hurled himself upon his opponent.

The other's blazing eyes narrowed ominously. He met Broom's mad rush with a swing of his heavy arm. The impact resounded sharply, and there was considerable force behind the blow, for the brute staggered and again fell.

Recovering himself, he stood sucking his bleeding lips, and glaring venomously at his antagonist. "*You* won't stand this!" he shouted with a blast of profanity; "and who are *you?*" Then with an insolent laugh: "Oh, I see now how 'tis, I was poaching on your preserves."

The trader made a quick step toward him.

But defiantly the fellow went on: "Of course if

I'd known how matters stood between you and this little——"

"Silence!" roared Roy, rushing upon him. "Silence! Speak another word and I will kill you! By heaven, I will! I will kill you where you stand!" His eyes fixed upon the other's blazing orbs and held them.

Broom was no coward, but there was such fierce wrath in the trader's look that it caused him to hesitate, and in that moment of hesitation he remembered what he had lost all thought of in his baffled fury—remembered that Roy was all-powerful in those parts, where he held the food supply and controlled the natives; that the trader could turn him adrift in the trackless wilderness to meet a certain death. And in another moment he had recovered himself.

He laughed awkwardly. "I beg pardon," he said with a sneer; "I will leave you with the—lady." Then, bowing mockingly to Kasba, who was now on her feet, he left them.

When the fellow had gone, Roy went up to the girl, and taking one of her hands softly in both his, began to comfort her. She was breathing heavily and her face was pale. "Oh, I am so terrified!" she said; "I know he will do you harm. He will kill you! Heaven! It would be terrible!"

"It wouldn't be the first time it was tried," Roy answered with an easy laugh. "Don't worry, little friend," he added, patting her hand tenderly.

A wave of color flooded the girl's face. "Oh, you are so strong, and so brave," she cried, then stopped, lost in admiration. She stood looking at him now out of half-closed eyes. Her lashes were long, and shadowed the orbs so that he could not see the expression in them. Then she smiled dazzlingly and turned her face aside, but one full blushing cheek was kept towards him and one shell-like little ear—I am afraid this heroine of ours was a natural little coquette.

Roy started a little and tried to scrutinize the girl's face more closely.

Kasba's breath came quickly, her heart palpitated wildly, the crimson deepened in her cheeks and brow. Her secret was there—plain for him to read, and he would have been blind, indeed, had he not read it.

Surprised, and somewhat startled, he dropped her hand and stepped back, looking at her uncertainly for a moment. Then Kasba laughed, a nervous little laugh, and tossing her head back, and opening her eyes wide, looked at him roguishly,—brown as a berry but a veritable little beauty.

For a few moments there was silence, then Roy turned and walked away. A profound pity was in his eyes.

But the girl's flashed and she stamped her little foot furiously. Her teeth set tightly, her breath coming and going swiftly. Then tears trembled in her eyes, and in an irresistible impulse of yearning she threw out her arms and softly called his name.

But he did not pause or look back, and she dropped her arms and bent her head with a sigh of pain. She was a little bundle of opposites, this dusky maiden.

Hitherto she had roamed the country unattended and unmolested, pure, happy, serene. Now at one blow all this was changed. Broom's assault on her had opened her eyes to the danger of wandering alone. Her violent struggles to free herself from his tight embrace had bruised her arms and bosom, and she ached in every limb. But her agony of body was as nothing compared with her agony of mind. Ignorant of the world, she knew nothing of the prejudices of rank or race, but Roy's walking away had somehow revealed their relative positions; and Kasba considered it folly to think anything good could possibly come from her unwise affection.

After a time she stooped down, and, lifting up the bundle of sticks, threw it across her back, then moved away. Erect and supple, gently swaying under her burden, she glided along.

Crossing a small pond in a deep hollow in the summit of the rocks, she came in sight of her father's hut, which stood quite alone, at some little distance from the Fort, in the sheltering angle of a ridge of rocks.

Delgezie, her father, was a widower, and as Kasba was his only child he showered all the love of his poor old heart upon her. Nothing was too good for her, no sacrifice too great. She had been brought up at Churchill, and though he still clung to many of the

superstitions of his race, he had allowed her to attend the day school conducted by the missionary, and in the end to spend most of her childhood at the Mission, for the missionary's wife had soon become fond of the bright little motherless girl, and had easily persuaded the doting old man that it was to the girl's advantage. So it had come about that it was to this good lady Kasba owed her superior manners and refinement.

Kasba had been exceedingly happy in those days. But since she had come with her father to Fort Future a deep shadow had come into her young life. She had offered Roy Thursby all the love of her warm little heart and he had turned from it. She was intensely miserable. In her present misery she thought of those cloudless days, and a sigh escaped her.

"You are sad, Kasba," said a voice in Chipewyan at her side.

The girl stopped and looked up. It was Sahanderry, a tall, active-looking native.

Kasba turned to him with a wan smile. She was fond of Sahanderry, for she had known him all her life; besides, he wished to marry her. Remembering how quickly Roy had turned away on discovering her secret love for him, a feeling of tenderness came over her for this Indian. "Should she spoil his life?" she asked herself. "What had she to do with love? The girls of her race," she argued, "had no voice in the choosing of their husbands." For the

first time in her life she felt discontented with her lot.

"Leave it, Sahanderry," she said, a trifle bitterly, as he reached up to take the bundle from her back. "It's contrary to the customs of our race for men to carry wood; that's woman's work."

Sahanderry looked at her a moment in surprise.

"But you are not like the other women of our race," he urged, quietly.

"Still I am a Chipewyan," she burst forth. Then seeing the pained, puzzled expression on his face, she put out her hand tenderly and touched him on the arm. "Forgive me," she said, "I am sorry. I did not mean to be unkind. What I meant to say was that I'm a Chipewyan and must follow the customs of my people." With this she walked on.

The man stood bewildered. He could not understand Kasba in her present mood. He had often met her in this way and she had never before objected to his taking her burden. He felt she was behaving unfairly. He watched her for a moment, then, like a faithful dog, slowly followed after. He had not gone far, however, before he saw her stop and look round. At this, he quickened his footsteps, caught up with her and walked close behind her, for the rest of the way in silence.

Arriving at the hut, the girl dropped her load and entered, and instantly attended to the fire.

The hut was built of logs, caulked with moss, and had a flat roof. It comprised only one room. In the

centre of this was a large Carron stove, the pipes from which completely encircled the room before bolting out of a hole in the roof to carry off the smoke. The walls were bare of paint and ornamented with snowshoes, dog-whips, shotbags and such other paraphernalia of the chase. A few rude shelves held such articles as a clock and a lamp, while the table was of rough plank, and a few empty cases did duty for chairs. Pushed against the rear wall and opposite the door were two narrow beds, neatly covered with deerskin robes. High overhead several long sticks or poles had been suspended horizontally to form a rack or shelf, on the theory that heat rises, and half-a-dozen fish lay there slowly thawing out, while several pairs of moccasins, in various stages of dryness, dangled from it by their strings. The place, though primitive, was clean and tidy, and bore unmistakable signs of a woman's careful attention.

Sahanderry brought in an armful of wood, which he dropped beside the stove. Kasba reached out her hand blindly, placed a few of the pieces gingerly upon the embers and blew the whole into a blaze; then, satisfied that the fire was well under way, she rose from her knees, and putting off her outdoor clothing, selected half-a-dozen ptarmigan from a number on the table, and, seating herself on an empty sugar-case, commenced to pluck the birds into a large tin bowl at her feet. She worked the faster because a dull pain was making itself felt in her heart.

There was silence. Presently the man fumbled in

his pocket and brought forth a knife and a plug of nigger-head, which he proceeded to cut up on a corner of the table. He glanced at the girl slyly.

The noise of the tobacco-cutting and the crackling of the fire were the only sounds to break the stillness.

Having duly and solemnly finished the operation, Sahanderry took out his pipe, which he leisurely filled. Presently there was a grunt of satisfaction, and a cloud of smoke issued from his mouth.

The girl threw him a furtive glance. He happened to be looking at her at that instant and caught her in the act. Kasba dropped her head. A wistful expression came into the man's face, and laying aside his pipe, he leaned forward, as if to get a closer look at her countenance, but she dropped her head still lower.

"Kasba," he said earnestly, then stooped over her, gently tilting her chin upwards so that he could see her face more closely, "why won't you promise to marry me when we get back to Churchill?"

"Because I am a bad, wicked Indian," she said presently with a show of impulse, and tearing herself free.

The man stood staring at her, thunderstruck. "*You* bad! *You* wicked!" he ejaculated, greatly amazed. Then, suddenly his look of amazement changed to one of outrage. His brow darkened and his eyes struck fire. "If *Bekothrie* (master) has——" he began, shaking his fist in the air.

But the girl sprang to her feet and stopped him with some little excitement. The bird she was

plucking fell from her lap to the feathers in the bowl and sank out of sight. "Hush, Sahanderry!" she cried, severely. "Remember, it is of the master you are speaking."

The man fairly hung his head.

Now Kasba with all her impetuosity possessed considerable sense of justice and grasping his arm tightly, she went on resolutely. "You must not speak against Mr. Thursby. This trouble is all of my own making. I alone am to blame. I have been very silly, and—if you will forgive me and be patient with me, I—I—" she dropped her head.

"You will love me?" he suggested, eagerly, his face betraying the liveliest emotions.

She was silent several moments, then raised her face, a little paler than it had been, but with a passionless resolve set on it. "If I can," she responded bravely, giving him her hands. "I will *try* to love you, I—" she stopped and his arms went about her.

"You make me very happy!" he said. Then he kissed her.

She closed her eyes to shut out the look on his face, and pushed him gently from her. "No, no; not now!" she said, all in a tremble. "Give me time. Give this evil spell time to pass away, and be good and patient with me."

"I will be patient, Kasba," he said, pressing her hand.

The man's actions reminded her sharply of how soothingly another had patted her hand shortly be-

fore, how the other's touch had caused the blood to dance in her veins and to rush to her face and her heart to beat so wildly with joy that it had shown itself in her eyes; and she withdrew her hand quickly.

"What is the matter?" enquired Sahanderry, feeling the rebuke.

"Nothing," replied the girl a trifle coldly and drawing back a little. "You had better go now, the master will be wanting you."

The man bowed his head mutely, and turned slowly on his heel. At the door he looked back. She smiled at him, but there was a great deal of sadness in the look. He returned the smile and went out.

The girl stood still and watched him go. Then with her handkerchief she rubbed vigorously at her cheek—the place where Sahanderry had kissed her.

CHAPTER II.

FORT FUTURE.

Fort Future consisted of a solitary group of small buildings situated near the mouth of Chesterfield Inlet, which is in the Barren Lands. It seemed as if the buildings must have sprung up there of themselves, like so many mushrooms; or must have been dropped from the heavens, or else carried there by one of those raging, tearing windstorms that sweep over that part of the country, so incongruous did they appear in that vast northern wilderness.

Nevertheless, Fort Future was a comfortable place in its way—at least so said Roy Thursby; for he, like most of the Company's officers, was acquainted with starvation, solitude and desolation, and knew there were posts compared with which Fort Future, with its unfailing supply of country provisions, was a veritable paradise. Broom called it "a rotten hole," "the last place that God Almighty made," and by much worse names; all of which Roy would laughingly refute by telling him that he was a sailor, and therefore never satisfied; that for himself he had no objections to banishment; and Broom would retaliate by asserting that Roy was a Hudson's Bay man, that the Company owned him body and soul, and that he was there because he had been sent—which

was true as to the last part. The Hudson's Bay Company had required a fearless and staunch man to establish a post at Chesterfield Inlet, and after some correspondence with his chief—Roy was then second in charge at York Factory—Thursby had been chosen. His willingness to go, if ever thought of at all, had been looked upon as a mere matter of course. The Company's interests had to be attended to, therefore go he must, willing or unwilling. Luckily for him, and perhaps for the Company too, the enterprise had appealed to the strong spirit of adventure in the young officer, and he had entered into the scheme with eagerness and made his arrangements with all enthusiasm, treating the prospective dangers with total indifference. The wonderful Far North breeds men of this stamp: men of courage, resourcefulness and self-reliance; men who fear nothing and live hard.

That was more than a year ago, and in the interval he had established the post and enthroned himself, so to speak, monarch of all he surveyed. He held his kingdom and ruled his subjects—wandering bands of Eskimo, who displayed a curious mixture of simplicity and fear and a disposition to high-handed robbery with an indomitable will and daring courage. The works of some Arctic voyagers describe the Eskimos as inveterate thieves and of murderous dispositions, while others speak of them as honest, good-natured fellows, which is perplexing. But the fact is, both descriptions are true, even of people of the same tribe, which proves the Eskimo

character is a difficult problem to solve. At one time he may be good and amiable, and at another all that is bad and treacherous. Much depends upon conditions.

Besides himself, the resident population of Fort Future consisted of five other human beings, to wit: the man Broom, Kasba, Delgezie, Sahanderry, and a boy named David. The last four were Chipewyan Indians from Churchill. In fact, save these and a few wandering bands of Eskimo, there was not another human being to be found within a hundred miles of this desolate spot in any direction, and then only a few transient visitors such as came with American and other whalers.

Roy Thursby was a bachelor, though not indisposed to change his estate under favorable conditions, as we shall see; Sahanderry cooked for him and did the general housework, while Kasba washed and mended his clothes.

The Fort stood on an old gravel beach about five miles from the coast. The inlet or river widened immediately before it, and miles of ice hummocks extended where once the restless wave had raised its angry crest; countless masses thrown up into weird, fantastic shapes by the peculiar workings of some mysterious submarine power, their formation was constantly changing in these strange upheavals. The establishment consisted of a few one-storey log buildings. The trading-store, warehouse, and one or two minor stores were grouped together, while the "master's" house stood apart in the background. A

small coast-boat, hauled well above high-water mark, lay propped up in its winter quarters; a flagstaff reared its head skywards; and a number of Eskimo dogs ran about among the buildings or lay curled up in the snow, their long hairy coats covered with rime.

Roy Thursby was worried. Broom's assault on Kasba foreshadowed trouble, and much of it, in the future. Also, Roy was greatly annoyed. At first he was determined to make Broom "hit the track." His presence at the Fort would now be a constant menace to his peace of mind. Therefore the fellow must go.

But as he became calmer, Roy's better nature asserted itself. He remembered that terms of familiarity prevailed among Broom's late associates, and he decided, after severely cautioning him, to let the unpleasant incident drop.

Broom had lived two years among the Eskimos. A man of a different nature and a higher moral tone might have improved the natives during this two years. But the fellow had drifted with the current of popular custom and had adopted tribal manners and usages. I do not think he would have ill-treated a woman; but he looked upon them as being created solely for the use and pleasure of man.

Then, too, Roy was distressed at discovering Kasba's secret. The knowledge that Kasba loved him surprised and pained him beyond measure. For he was not a vain man. He had always admired the girl, she was so quiet, and had such pretty, shy little ways and gestures; but beyond thinking of her as a

pleasant little thing to have about him, he had never given her a thought. Under the new conditions he hardly knew what to do. There was a deep tinge of pity for her in his thoughts. The matter was still puzzling him when he arrived at the door of his dwelling.

The dogs greeted him with suppressed growls of welcome. Jumping up, they sniffed enquiringly at the bag on his back. With a "Down, Flyer, Mush, Klondike!" he slipped his feet out of his snowshoe lines and crossed the threshold.

The two-roomed house contained a kitchen and what served as a bed-room and living-room; had only one door, and very few windows. There was little of luxury. In the kitchen a large cookstove, on which several kettles stood simmering and emitting little clouds of steam, was the chief ornament. A very serviceable water-barrel stood in one corner, while a large wood-box occupied another. Pots and pans hung from nails in the walls and a heavy table of rough plank occupied a position near the stove. The floor was of plank and well swept, for Roy was fastidious. The walls of the other room were whitewashed, the chairs and table all country-made and unpainted. A large wooden clock ticked solemnly on the wall, and there were pictures and photographs tacked up or standing on shelves, with a conglomeration of other small articles more or less useful.

Roy dropped the bag from his shoulders and emptied its contents on the kitchen floor. There were three white foxes and a blue one. These he hung up

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to thaw. Then he stepped into the inner room and there pulled off his outdoor clothing.

Seated in a chair, with his feet resting on the lower of two bunks which were fitted on one side of the room, was Broom. He was reading a book with a paper cover brilliantly illuminated—one of those "Three-Fingered Jack" series of stories so eagerly devoured by uncultured minds.

Broom shut the book as Roy entered the room. He nodded familiarly, distorted his swollen lips into a smile and dropped his feet to the floor. "Well, what luck?" he inquired with feigned interest.

"Three whites and a blue," replied the trader. He tried to put some heartiness into his words, but the irritation he still felt at the man held him back. He went back to the kitchen to wash his hands, and Broom returned to his book.

Pausing in his ablutions, Roy threw the man a searching glance. He now had a great mistrust of him. And here I may perhaps best explain who Broom was, as he is a gentleman with whom we shall have much concern in these pages.

Broom was a runaway sailor. Deserting his ship at Cape Fullerton, he had one day turned up at Fort Future. He might be one of those worthless characters found in all occupations, but he was a white man, and that had been enough for Roy Thursby. Besides he had shown considerable courage in attempting a solitary journey down the coast to the Fort. This appealed to Roy and he had allowed him

to stay on, intending to give him a passage in the coast-boat that went south in the spring. At first the runaway had been very energetic. He had made himself useful about the place and regularly attended the few traps he had put down, as he laughingly remarked, to keep himself in tobacco, but latterly he had slackened off and appeared discontented. He displayed fits of irritability and moodiness. Roy had noticed this, and after Broom's late outbreak he seriously doubted his wisdom in having harbored him. Debating the question, he went back to the inner room and sat down; then in very plain language told the sailor what he thought of his conduct. Broom looked at him through half-closed lids; his lips were still parted, but the smile was gone. Then he exploded. "Hang it all!" he said sulkily; "you needn't be hard on a fellow."

"Well, behave yourself, then," said Roy, firmly, and having spoken his mind he would have dropped the subject.

But the other did not seem disposed to allow him. "She's a pretty little baggage for an Indian," he asserted, "and what's more, she knows it."

Roy directed a searching glance at the sneering face of the speaker, but paid no attention to the remark except, perhaps, that he raised his eyebrows a little. He naturally possessed more self-control than most young men of five and twenty. He was high-spirited, and could not brook an insult; but he was inclined to consider the source of a remark before he

retaliated. Besides, he wished to avoid another quarrel, for he knew it would serve to widen the breach already broad enough between them.

"Wonder some Indian brave hasn't snapped her up and carried her off to his happy wigwam," Broom went on. "But there!" he added, "I suppose she'd turn up her pretty little nose at a native. She wants a white man." Then, with emphasis there was no misunderstanding, "and no understrapper at that."

Jumping to his feet, Roy stood before the fellow. A flush of manifest vexation burned upon his cheek. His hands clenched involuntarily. His eyes flashed, but restraining himself, he said: "Look here, Broom, that's enough! I'll have no more of your veiled insinuations, or hear any more disrespectful remarks about that girl."

The sailor laughed quietly for a moment as if he had some mighty good joke in his mind, then with a half-deprecative, half-protesting movement of the hand, "All right," he said, "don't get on your ear. There's no need for us to quarrel over a native."

"But I strongly object to the tone you adopt when speaking of the girl," persisted Roy, indignantly, "and while we are on the subject I may as well tell you that I will not tolerate any more of it. You are my guest, so to speak, but my patience has an end, and my hospitality its limits."

Broom's jaw dropped; he was evidently nonplussed.

There was a silence. Broom's eyes were fixed upon

the floor. He seemed to be considering. Roy turned away to walk up and down.

"Oh, stow it!" exclaimed Broom at last, without raising his eyes. "You Hudson's Bay men are not so dashed good yourselves that you can afford to lecture others."

"That is as may be," returned the trader sharply, "but you see, I'm master here and——"

"The king can do no wrong," finished the other sententiously. Then he laughed and suddenly extended his hand. "Come, shake hands," he cried. "You're not a bad chap in spite of your sanctimonious airs."

This remark was evidently intended as an overture of reconciliation. Roy stared hard at him for a moment, then glanced at the outstretched hand. He hated quarrelling, but he was feeling too angry at the man to forgive him thus easily. The other noticed Roy's hesitation and look, and quickly dropped his hand. Somewhat staggered, the fellow sat twisting his moustache, pulling at his shaggy beard and scowling at the trader, who had resumed his pacing. After spending a portion of his discomfiture in this manner, Broom again essayed a remark.

"Guess I was in the wrong," he said, as if by way of general retraction. "You've been a good friend to me, in fact you saved my life. For when I drifted in here, after deserting that blighted whaler, I was all in; the winter was upon me, and, why! I hadn't enough clothes to flag a train." At this he laughed

heartily. "You took me in, clothed me, and killed the fatted caribou. Hang it, shake!" and he thrust forth his hand again.

Roy stopped perambulating. "Perhaps I've been a little hasty," he said, and took the man's hand, though he was still only half mollified, for this sudden warmth of gratitude struck him as feigned. "She is a demure, soft-hearted little thing, and I do not like to hear her spoken of in that way," he explained, dropping into a chair.

"Oh, of course not!" observed Broom with a suggestion of sarcasm in his tone.

"Her father, Delgezie, works for me; he has worked for the Company all his life," continued Roy severely, his eyes beginning to flash again. "He is a pure-blooded Indian, a faithful servant, a gentle, God-fearing old man, and his daughter, who was orphaned at a very early age, is a very remarkable girl. She was practically brought up by the missionary's wife at Churchill, you know, and her polite, civilized manner and extraordinary intelligence have attracted great attention and remark from people travelling through the country; and I now warn you: The man who fools with that girl will have *me* to reckon with."

The sailor started and glanced at him for an instant under his brows; the veins swelled at his temples, and a dull, angry light came into his eyes. "Oh, he will, will he?" he sneered.

Almost as these words were uttered a dark face was thrust into the room and a voice cried out in

Chipewyan. Roy answered in the same language and the face disappeared.

Broom looked enquiringly at the trader, who was pulling on a coat. The angry light was still in Broom's eyes, but his tone changed very much when he spoke again. "What's that he says?" he asked, suavely. "I don't understand that lingo."

"He says there are Eskimo arriving," replied Roy shortly; and he went out to watch the approach of the natives.

Then Broom half closed his eyes and an expression of malignant and devilish hatred came over his face. "So you threaten me, my Hudson's Bay rooster," he murmured. "Well, you may crow in your own yard, curse you, but don't crow too loudly, for you don't own the earth." Then, gently rubbing his wounded lips, he added, almost in a whisper, and there was a low hiss in the words: "And you shall pay dearly for that blow."

The wind was fair and the Eskimos came racing before it at a great speed. Relieved of any effort by the wind and sails, the dogs ran beside the flying *com-it-uks* (Eskimo sleds) in apparent jubilation, while the natives—with the exception of the two required to steer each of these unwieldy, improvised ice-boats—were sitting on the loads with smiles of satisfaction, feeling that all was as it should be. As they neared the Fort the big parchment sails were dropped and the dogs brought into action. The number of dogs attached to each *com-it-uk* varied, not according to the weight of the load, as one would

imagine, but according to the total number possessed by the Eskimos travelling with it. Where dogs were lacking natives dropped into the vacant places and hauled on the "bridles" (traces) as substitutes. The heavily-laden sleds* were with difficulty dragged to the warehouse where Roy stood, with door wide open, ready to receive them.

The odd commingling of tongues was confusing. Roy was giving occasional sharp orders in Eskimo, and holding scraps of conversation in his own tongue with Broom, whom he had suddenly found standing beside him, while the voluble Sahanderry ran about loudly vociferating in Chipewyan. Added to this was the hum occasioned by the Eskimos speaking among themselves and the chorus of a few dozen dogs.

The new arrivals were all dressed alike in hairy deerskin clothing, and scarcely anyone but a native could have distinguished male from female, except

*These sleds, generally known as Eskimo sleds, are made of two runners some thirty feet long, four inches deep and two inches thick, and are mostly shod with whalebone. but in its absence mud is used. This latter is put on hot and allowed to freeze, then planed smooth and "iced" by quickly drawing a streaming-wet piece of white bearskin or blanket over it. This process of icing takes place every night. Whalebone does not require icing, so has this advantage over mud and is used altogether by the most Northern Eskimo. Wooden bars are fastened across these long runners at intervals of six inches, and a ground-lashing of clapmatch line, or rope, run fore and aft on either side. The load is lashed down to this. Very heavy loads can be hauled on this kind of sled; in fact, ten hundred pounds' weight on an Eskimo sled is merely equivalent to four hundred on a flat sled (toboggan). The serious disadvantage of mud is felt in the spring, when the mud thaws out and drops off in chunks.

for a band of brass which some of the women wore around their foreheads. Yet the trader was able to greet each of the natives by name without making a mistake, even when two brothers appeared.

"Well, Oulybuck," he cried, shaking hands with a young Eskimo. "Where's Piglinick? Isn't he here?"

"No. He's dead," returned the native.

"Dead!" echoed Roy, with a look of profound astonishment.

"Yes," continued the native, dryly, "we hung him last moon."

"Hung him last moon!" repeated the horrified trader, staring blankly at the broad-smiling Eskimo for a few seconds, then bursting into a roar of laughter.

"Beats cock-fighting," observed Broom, sententiously.

"Yes," said Roy, recovering himself somewhat. Then turning to Oulybuck, "Why did you hang him?" he asked.

But Oulybuck ignored the question. "Hung Kinnicky, too," he said, smiling as if proud of this double achievement.

"Goodness me; why, he's hung his father also!" cried the astonished Roy. His face now changed its expression to one of consternation.

"A regular Jack Ketch," asserted Broom.

"Tell us about it, Oulybuck. Why did you do it?" asked Roy, who had become grave. He scarcely knew what to make of such summary proceedings.

The native, nothing loth, told his story in a few words, interspersed with long pauses.

It appeared that his father, Kinnicky, and his brother, Piglinick, who had accompanied him the last time he had come to the Fort, had been taken ill shortly after starting on their return journey. As days passed by and he got no better, Kinnicky decided to end his sufferings. He bade Oulybuck build him an *iglo* without the complete dome. This Oulybuck dutifully did, and with the aid of a sled runner, which was placed across the top of the structure reaching from wall to wall, and a piece of clapmatch line, which hung from the runner and terminated in a noose, Kinnicky was left dancing in the air. This somewhat unique cure seems to have recommended itself to Piglinick also, for soon he was hanging beside his father.

Oulybuck finished his story with a look of conscious pride at the part he had played in the matter.

"I wonder where they got the idea of hanging," said Broom, breaking the silence that followed.

Roy shook his head. He was puzzled by the strange yarn of the Eskimo; such proceedings appeared so very barbarous, even in that remote country, far from all law and order. Yet he thoroughly understood, from his knowledge of the Eskimo character, that the whole astounding performance had been carried out by Oulybuck in perfect good faith. The Eskimo had merely obeyed his father and elder brother's commands in assisting them to commit sui-

cide, the same as he would have implicitly obeyed any other order they might have given him.

While Oulybuck was engaged with his story the other Eskimos had chosen a suitable spot on which to erect their *iglos* (snow-houses) and had started to make them. Working in three gangs, they labored on as many *iglos*. Cutting large blocks of snow from an adjacent drift they carried them to other Eskimos, who built them into walls around themselves. Dexterously they trimmed the blocks with the *pin-uks* (snow-knives), fitting them into place with great exactness. Speedily the walls went up, and as they grew in height so they decreased in circumference, till at last only the heads of the builders could be seen. Snow blocks were then neatly fitted to the remaining spaces, and the men were immured in prisons of their own construction; but they were quickly released by their friends on the outside, who cut holes through the walls near the base of the *iglos* to serve as entrances. In front of these holes blocks of snow were placed to act as doors; and the cracks in the walls were sealed with loose snow. This completed these primitive but serviceable snow houses and they were quickly tenanted. In fact the whole performance was marked by the expeditious way in which it was accomplished.

Meanwhile the trader and his companion had returned to the house and were now blowing clouds of blue smoke. Broom sat in his favorite position with feet resting on the bottom bunk, while Roy lounged

comfortably back with one leg dangling over the arm of his chair.

Jumping up suddenly, Roy put a box of cigars and two enamelled mugs upon the table, then produced a bottle of whiskey from a locked box. He had resolved to spend the evening as pleasantly as possible. Pushing the cigars toward the sailor, he said, "Have a cigar? Help yourself."

Broom grinned appreciatively and complied with ready acquiescence.

"Don't care if I do," he answered, taking one and brightening.

The trader drew the cork and passed the bottle to his companion, who took it with sundry little chuckles of satisfaction, and after several long approving sniffs, poured out a goodly potation, which he tossed off with a whimsical wink and a curt nod. Then his hand went quickly to his mouth, and for a fleeting second his face assumed a most unpleasant expression, for the raw spirits stung his lips, which were cut and bruised by contact with the trader's fist.

The look, however, passed unobserved by Roy, who had taken the bottle and was helping himself moderately.

"Good stuff," sighed Broom, presently, gazing affectionately into his empty mug.

"Yes, and very precious in these parts," said Roy. "I got only one case last fall; but I've managed to make it hold out pretty well."

"You certainly have," returned Broom, putting up his mug with apparent reluctance.

Then the two men settled themselves in their chairs and blew more clouds of smoke. Broom made free with the box of cigars and sprawled himself out comfortably, his face wearing an expression which indicated that he was highly satisfied with himself.

Suddenly he started chuckling to himself.

"What's the joke," inquired Roy.

"Oh, I was thinking of a fellow on the whaler," replied Broom, removing the cigar from his mouth and gazing meditatively at the burning tip. "He was hammering a dog one day when the skipper interposed. 'You seem to have a spite against that dog,' said the skipper. 'No, I ain't got no grudge against the dog,' said the fellow, 'I'm just showing my author-*i*-ity.'"

After this the sailor fairly surpassed himself in wit and good humor, and Roy was in constant bursts of laughter at his stories and metaphors. Curious to know the cause of this unusual mirth, Sahanderry hastily finished his work in the kitchen, and stood in the doorway listening to the conversation. The Indian's presence seemed to irritate Broom, who frequently threw him a contemptuous glance and seemed impatient to order him away.

"Come, Sahanderry," said the trader, at length; "you're a hunter; give us a yarn."

The moment the Indian's name was mentioned Broom's face assumed a sneer and his eyes flashed spitefully, for even in the short time he had been at the Fort he and the Indian had for some reason become bitter enemies. He shifted uncomfortably in

his chair, and appeared about to make some scornful remark, but changed his mind and sat twisting his moustache instead. Sahanderry's face was immediately suffused with smiles. He wiped his mouth and cleared his throat. Then the smiles vanished and his countenance took a solemn, mournful expression.

"I'll tell you about a *na-ra-yah* (wolverine)," he said, moistening his lips with a thick tongue.

"Fire away, then!" cried Roy.

The Indian stood and preened himself a moment, then started off in a stentorian voice, moving his arms in unison. He told how a wolverine had been caught in a trap that he had set for a fox, and how in its struggles to get free it had broken the chain and gone off with the trap attached to its foot. Gesticulating wildly, the man got more and more excited as he progressed with his story. A graphic description of a *na-ra-yah* in *rigor mortis* was given. The Indian's uncouth antics and profound gravity in the portrayal created great amusement.

"Upon my word, Sahanderry," said Broom, when the Indian had finished, "you are a most delightful liar."

Sahanderry's eyes flashed at this doubtful comment. He appeared about to spring at his tormentor, who was still twisting the ends of his moustache. There was a moment of silence. The sailor sat looking at the Indian with exasperating calmness. The Indian breathed heavily, glaring at the sailor.

"What right has Broom to call me a liar?" he demanded, turning to Roy.

"Broom! you black scoundrel, Broom!" cried the man of the sea, "I'll have you remember that I've a handle to my name."

"Well, Broom-handle, then," retorted Sahanderry sharply.

The sailor half rose from his chair in a gust of passion as if he would make for Sahanderry, but evidently changed his mind, for he dropped slowly back to his seat. At a wave of the hand from the trader, Sahanderry retired in a sulky mood to the kitchen.

After a time Broom forced a smile to his face.

"Not bad for an Indian!" he admitted with dubious praise, and with an attempt at a laugh.

"No," returned Roy shortly. Then he spoke of the destructive habits of the wolverine.

At this juncture there was a slight shuffling noise in the kitchen, accompanied by a sound of heavy breathing. The noise drew nearer, and presently with a long "Phew!" an Eskimo ushered himself into the room. He paused for a moment as if to make sure of his welcome, then at a nod from the *A-hoo-mit-uk* (master) he squatted down where he stood. It was Ocpic the Murderer, a sobriquet he had earned, it was said by killing seven other Eskimos.

Seating himself on his haunches in the doorway, he divested himself of his *tko-ti-tok* (coat) by pulling

it over his head, and sat in his *at-ti-yi* (shirt), smiling blandly, his little black, oblique eyes alertly watching.

While the two white men were engaged in conversation, the Eskimo's eyes wandered about the room and eventually fixed themselves on a large key which hung on a nail at the head of one of the bunks.

The little black eyes flashed and twinkled, for their owner was aware that this key opened the trading store—that little paradise which contained everything dear to the Eskimo heart. Ocpic knew where a new net hung, a fine new salmon net, made and just ready to drop in the water; and he would be badly in need of a net in the spring. There was nothing to prevent his obtaining the net, nothing but that key. He gave it a long earnest look, then suddenly dropped his gaze and a crafty expression came on his face.

Neither Roy nor Broom noticed Ocpic's prolonged gaze at the key, nor observed the stealthy gleam which came to Ocpic's eye. They were speaking of the manners and mode of life of these strange, littoral people, who inhabit nearly five thousand miles of seaboard from East Greenland to the Peninsula of Alaska, and who throughout all that vast range speak essentially the same language.

"They certainly are a peculiar race," remarked Roy in conclusion. "I have read somewhere that they are an intermediate species between man and the sea-cow."

Both men looked across at the Eskimo. He was

sitting in the same position and smiled at them as they looked his way.

Then there was a voice at the door crying, "*Delgezie yu-cuzz-ie, Bekothrie*" (Delgezie is coming, master).

Roy jumped excitedly to his feet. He had heard the voice, but had not distinguished the words, and thought for a moment that the anxiously awaited "packet" had been sighted.

"Delgezie," said Sahanderry, shortly, putting his head into the room.

"Oh," and the trader's face lengthened visibly. He paused irresolutely, then reached down his "hairy-coat" and fur cap and strode out of the house.

Yawning prodigiously, Broom slowly rose to his feet. Then he deliberately filled and lit his pipe, pulled on a coat and stuck a cap on his head and leisurely followed Roy, leaving Ocpic alone with the key.

CHAPTER III.

KASBA FIGHTS A BITTER FIGHT.

KASBA sat on her narrow bed in a thoughtful and melancholy posture. Her pretty oval chin rested in the palm of her hand, and she leaned forward so that her elbow rested on her knee and upheld the forearm. She was gazing at her reflection in a small hand-mirror, but without interest. In fact her gaze was one of disparagement rather than of admiration, and with a heavy sigh she let the glass fall into her lap and sat lost in thought. The master was not in love with her and she knew, as if by direct intuition, that he had no intention of becoming so. There was not the least chance for her any longer, and she threw the glass behind her, somewhat petulantly it must be admitted, and dropped her face into her hands; for of what use was beauty if it did not win her the man she loved? She had known him a long time, many years it seemed to her, and had grown to love him. Love him! oh, how she loved him! Yet in all that time he had not spoken one word of love to her. And now that she had showed him her heart perhaps he despised her, or pitied her, which was worse. At that she sprang to her feet. She was no longer the calm, gentle-natured Kasba, but Kasba the Indian in whose veins ran the blood of a great race. She

was a strange mixture of humility and pride, this Indian maid. As she stood there, her head raised proudly, her nostrils quivering, her eyes flashing, her form rounded yet slight, her varying color, her tender youth and singular grace of attitude would have inspired an artist with the ideal of Indian beauty. Then her eyes filled and she gulped down a sob. She was feeling very bitter and rebellious. She felt that she had a grudge against Fate.

To every pure and innocent young girl, we are told, love is a condition of mind, not a strain on the senses. But Kasba knew nothing of this. She had not the conventional and sensitive delicacy of white girls. She was well aware of life's evil truths, and knew that Broom would have gone to any lengths to have possessed her. Roy was not that kind of a man; though in her secret heart she wished that he had been. Poor Kasba! She was such a child. Physically she was quite grown up, but her mind was a child's mind. So confiding, so unprotected even by her own sense of right, she would have gone to him and not been aware of the fall. Was he not the *Master?* And was she not his, body and soul? Which goes to prove that Kasba's notions of love were very simple, rudimentary, and, certes, in no way coy. How should they be?

If the good lady at Churchill could have known the girl's state of mind at that moment she would have been greatly startled and appalled and had serious doubts as to whether her instruction, instead of the service she had intended, had not unsettled the

girl and done her a deadly injury. It cannot be denied that it was shocking, but all that the girl felt was very natural. How should it be otherwise? Her people had never been married, that is to say in the white man's way, until after the missionary had come amongst them; still they had been happy, while she had seen properly married white people who had not lived happily together. She, who had seen but few white people, had seen that, so what did it matter, married or unmarried, as long as they were together? So argued the girl, but deep down in her heart there was the Churchill lady's teaching, which was confused, dim, uncertain, but clamoring to be heard, and a guilty blush rushed to her cheek as she sat and covered her eyes with her hands in very shame; for she was conscious of the wickedness of what she felt and longed for, though she could not understand it.

Suddenly she dropped her hands from her eyes and sat bolt upright, staring at the wall opposite, and gave a little shuddering sigh. For all at once she understood that Roy had turned away because he was honorable, because he wished to be true to another, a girl of his own race, whom he loved. The girl's name was Lena. She knew that, for she had once heard someone chaffing him about a girl of that name and he had grown very red and confused. That was very long ago, but it all came back to her now, and she hated the girl Lena with her whole heart and soul. Why did he love that other girl? In striving to solve this riddle she was struck by a new idea. "He cannot care for me," she thought, "because my skin is

not white and I do not dress like the women of his people,"—like the women did in the drawings she had seen in some papers Roy had given her some time or other. Doubtless this other girl's—this Lena's—dresses covered her whole body, as the women's did in the pictures. She looked down at her own scanty garment, which was nevertheless very serviceable and becoming, though in sooth it might have displayed the curves of her form to better perfection, which left a considerable expanse of blue stroud legging exposed; the blood mounted in a wave to her face and throat and she kicked out her legs vexatiously, viewing them with offence; then drew them up beneath her as if to hide them forever from sight. You could not see the women's legs in the drawings because their dresses covered them to the ankles. Also they wore pretty hats instead of shawls, and boots instead of ugly moccasins. Still they looked very uncomfortable. Then she remembered how heartily she and the boy David had laughed over the pictures and wondered how white women could run before dogs, or paddle a canoe, or even make bannocks in such tight-fitting garments. As for herself, she would be suffocated, she was sure she would. And David had declared that he wouldn't have one of them for his partner on a trip for anything, not even if she promised him a new gun, which was saying much, and together they had poked fun and laughed uproariously at the idea.

Poor Kasba! Had she known how little Roy really troubled his head about her dress she might

have saved herself all this vexation of spirit. In saying this I do not for one moment wish to make our hero appear superior to other men. He was a man, with all a man's appreciation of what was beautiful in women; but if truth forbids me to depict Roy Thursby as a highly virtuous young man, justice forces me to declare that the sight of this young girl's legs had never caused him an untoward thought, though they were certainly not objects of offence.

But Kasba did not know what was in Roy's mind, and just then she would have risked suffocation or any such horrible calamity to be able to display herself before Roy for a few moments clothed after the fashion of the women of his race. She snapped her pretty white teeth like a little savage animal at the thought of the white girl, whom she envied the possession of civilized garments. She sat for a long time cogitating over the shocking immodesty of her costume. She could not have explained her thoughts in these words, it is true; but this is really what vexed her mind. Then her mood changed. A creature of many moods was this Indian girl. Why should she be ashamed of wearing her clothing according to the custom of her tribe? Then she was ashamed for ever having felt ashamed. Suddenly she stopped this train of thought, also, and her face clouded. Broom's name had crossed her mind. Then she remembered Sahanderry and her promise to him, and thoughts crowded in upon her till her brain reeled. She was a wicked girl, a very wicked girl. How shocked her dear father would be if he

knew. And the man she loved who had turned away that she might be an honest girl, what would he think? Yes. she was very, very wicked. Filled with disgust and loathing of herself she turned on her face and lay violently sobbing.

Presently she got up and lit a lamp. The fight was over; she had conquered the evil thoughts that had so cruelly beset her, which was due to her own nature, in which there was much good and hardly any evil. She had determined to face the situation bravely, and do what was right, according to her ideas of right, without any regard for her own feelings and inclination.

Probably Kasba had never heard of Satan's proclivity to provide employment for idle hands, but she was seldom found idle, and chiding herself now for the time she had wasted, in what she somewhat vaguely called "her folly," she began to make "cakes" (bannocks) against her father's return, for she was expecting him home hourly.

So engrossed was she in her work that she did not hear the door open, nor was she aware that David, an orphan Indian boy whom Delgezie had adopted, was in the house till a pair of cold arms caught her round the neck, and a still colder face was pressed against her own. Kasba drew the boy towards her and stroked his cold face with her warm hands.

"Well, dear," she said with a welcoming smile, "you gave me quite a start!"

"What were you thinking about, Kasba?" he asked. Then, "Oh, I've shot three deer!" he cried

with boyish enthusiasm, without waiting for a reply. Kasba was glad of the boy's abstraction and bent a tell-tale face over the half-cooked cakes.

"But you must be hungry," she said, handing the boy one newly-baked which he took and began to devour ravenously. He threw himself on the empty sugar case and the cake disappeared in big mouthfuls, while his large dark eyes flashed about the room.

He was a healthy-looking boy, with a bright, happy face. The blood in his cheeks shone through the dark skin, giving him a ruddy color pleasant to look upon.

In a remarkably short space of time David finished his meal and his wandering eyes came back to the girl by the stove. She was brewing a kettle of tea.

"We will go for the deer to-morrow," she said. "Why, you are getting quite a hunter! Is it far?"

"Just this side of the 'big hill.'" Then he paused and his brow grew suddenly dark. "You've been crying!" he exclaimed, fiercely, springing to his feet. Then catching Kasba by the arm, he gazed searchingly into her face. "What is it?" he cried sharply. Dropping the girl's arm he stood with angry eyes and clenched fists. "Was it Ball-eye?" (white-man, in this case meaning Broom) he asked.

The girl hesitated and dropped her eyes.

"It was Ball-eye," he cried with conviction. "I can see by your face it was." Then waving his clenched hands in the air he danced about the room in fiery anger. "Curse him!" he shouted. "If

ever I catch him sneaking round after you, I'll—I'll put a bullet in him, that's what I'll do."

"David! David! Please don't!" cried Kasba in great dismay, seizing him round the neck. "You must not talk like that. You will get into trouble." With this she sank on the seat he had vacated and drew him down beside her.

David's anger died suddenly. He was now struggling manfully to keep back the big tears which threatened to overwhelm him.

"Three deer! Why, David, you are getting quite a man!" said Kasba, with a proud smile, changing the subject.

"Yes, and I have something very funny to tell you," he said quickly, forgetting his previous agitation in his excitement.

Kasba gave him a smile of encouragement, while he curled himself up comfortably at her feet, gazing up into her face with bright, eager eyes.

"And what is this very funny thing you have to tell me?" she asked, with lively interest, playfully pinching his ear.

"Well," he began seriously, "I was near the 'big lake,' you know."

The girl nodded.

"I was watching a large buck deer. He was windward of me and came right up close, quite unconscious of my presence." He paused and the girl nodded again comprehendingly. "Go on," she said.

"Well," continued the boy, "I raised my rifle and

was about to fire when I heard a slight noise at my back. I looked, and there on the edge of the lake I saw three large wolves."

The girl started and drew in her breath sharply. "Three?" she asked, bending over and placing her hand on his.

"Yes, three," repeated the boy. "They were watching the deer, too, and acting so strangely that I lowered my rifle and waited to see what they would do. Presently two of them crouched down while the other made off. Keeping out of sight it slunk along till it got behind the deer, then the buck 'winded' it and sprang away straight to where the two other wolves were crouching." The boy paused for breath.

"Yes, yes," cried the girl, "go on, go on!" In her heated imagination she saw it all: the majestic buck deer, the three fierce, gaunt wolves, and the fearless boy.

David smiled again, pleased at the girl's excitement. "Just as the buck came up with the wolf at his heels they sprang from their ambush and pulled him down."

"And then—" prompted the girl, looking at him with her big, dark eyes.

"Well, then I fired two bullets at them. I think I wounded one. They stood and snarled."

The girl shuddered and pressed his hand tighter.

"Then I fired again. This time I killed a big grey fellow, the one which had run after the deer, and the others made off."

The girl drew a long, sharp breath, then, hugging him tightly around the neck, kissed him.

David laughed and fought for breath. "Don't you think the wolves were very cunning?" he asked. "Have you ever heard anything like that before?"

"They were very, very cunning," declared the girl. "It was wonderful, I have never heard the like." Then, stroking his hair caressingly, she added very seriously: "It was very brave of you to tackle three large wolves, David, but it was dangerous, and I wish you would not go so far from the Fort alone."

The boy smiled derisively at these girlish fears.

"But I have my rifle!" he said bravely. Then with a swagger he added: But I must 'ice' my sled ready for the morning," and filling a tin mug with lukewarm water, and taking a piece of bearskin from off a shelf, he went out.

With a sigh Kasba took down a pair of birchwood snowshoe frames from the rack overhead and sat down to net them. The frames were her own handiwork and well made; the wood had been cleverly pared down, the cross-pieces and toes and heels beautifully fitted and turned—all done, too, with only a small knife, called a "crooked knife," and an awl.

But lest any of my readers should fall into the error committed by the person who asked "whether snowshoes were warmer than shoes of ordinary wear," I will here more fully describe how these indispensable aids to winter perambulations are made.

First four pieces of birch or juniper, as the case may be, are carefully selected and cut into lengths varying from three to five feet or longer, according to the size of the snowshoes desired. These pieces are then whittled down to an inch in thickness, and each two fastened together at either end, bent to the shape of an oblong oval, some ten inches across its widest part, and turned up at the toe. Then the slender frames thus made are strengthened at the forepart by two crossbars, and at the heel by one bar. This completes them and they are hung up to dry. Later on they are netted in criss-cross fashion, somewhat after the manner of a tennis racket, with *babiche,* that is to say, narrow strips of undressed deerskin, which are well wetted before using. The foot netting, or in other words the netting on which the foot rests, is much coarser than that used for the heel and toe of the snowshoe. Of course I am describing a Chipewyan snowshoe. Snowshoes differ a little in shape among other tribes of Indians, but the principle is the same.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN OF THE SHADOWS.

Roy Thursby stood watching a small black speck which was moving slowly over the white surface of the river and coming in the direction of the Fort. Overhead was a magnificent Aurora Borealis extending high in bands of flickering color; a luminous phenomenon of all the colors of the rainbow, oscillating in electric waves. The gentle sighing of the wind, and an occasional dull, muffled sound from among the ice hummocks broke the silence. Near the trader were the dark figures of Kasba and David, in fact it was they who had given the alarm, and presently there was a slight crunching sound and Broom came striding up.

Dogs appeared as if by magic, and stood erect with ears pricked up expectantly, or darted forward with noses sniffing the air.

The black speck grew rapidly larger and larger, until presently it suddenly resolved itself into two portions, one of which, the smaller of the two, quickly mended its pace and was soon distinguishable as a man. The other travelled much slower, in a serpentine movement, swaying from side to side as it dodged the huge masses of shattered ice. This was

a dog-train and driver returning from a trip to an Eskimo encampment.

Before long the man in front was clambering over a prodigious snowdrift which obstructed the approach to the trading-post. He was one Minnihak, an Eskimo whom Thursby employed to run before the dogs when he sent out a trading venture.

The native lumbered forward with a broad grin. He was a droll figure from the hood of his *tko-li-tok* (coat) down to his *ka-miks* (shoes) covered with hoar-frost, and his "hairy" clothing gave him a shaggy appearance greatly resembling a white bear walking on its hind legs.

Thursby went forward to meet him.

"*Timo*," grunted the Eskimo, breathless from his late exertions.

"*Timo*," responded the other. He was too interested in the dog-train to take further notice of the native just then.

Minnihak took his welcome for granted. He turned to look for his partner, who was now close at hand.

The advancing train of dogs barked with sheer delight at being so near home. Nothing could stop them now; even the biggest laggard of a dog was in a perfect frenzy to proceed. The dogs at hand heard the song of those approaching and joined in the melody.

Ignoring the track left by the guide and despising every obstacle the arriving train came helter-skelter over the bristling hummocks. The heavily laden

com-it-uk (sled), swaying dangerously, crashed through the ice at an alarming speed. Up one side of the snowdrift and down the other it flew, threatening destruction to anything in its path, but a pull here and a push there guided it safely past every obstruction.

Then the home dogs vied with the newcomers in making so great an uproar that no human voice could possibly have made itself heard above the pandemonium. A free fight ensued, but a few sharp, stinging cuts from the well-directed lash of a whip drew the dogs' attention to other things. Then the pain of their wounds broke in upon them and they slunk off with whines and yells.

By the aid of Minnihak and Sahanderry the dogs were unharnessed and the heavily loaded sled taken away. Roy then turned to speak to Broom, but that individual had suddenly disappeared; and Kasba, possessing herself of her father's bag containing a deerskin robe and a change of footwear, also went silently away, while some distance ahead of her was David, staggering under a load of venison that Delgezie had given him to carry home.

As the girl moved away from the fort a dim figure appeared in the deep shadow at a corner of one of the buildings and stood looking after her. When she had disappeared among the rocks the watcher chuckled and followed after.

The slight crunch, crunch, of some one walking stealthily over the crisp snow soon attracted Kasba's attention. Twice she stopped to listen, throwing a

scared glance behind. The third time a voice close at hand startled her, and she stopped dead and turned right round. A dozen feet away, in the shadow of a large boulder she discovered an indistinct figure standing. The girl stood inert, staring as if fascinated.

"Kasba, wait a minute, I want you," said the voice in carefully modulated tones.

"What—do—you—want—with—me?" faltered the maiden, now thoroughly frightened.

"I want to speak to you," said the voice. Kasba shivered. She swayed and almost fell, for it was the voice of the man she so greatly feared.

"What do you want—I don't understand," she faltered, trying to move away, but now her legs refused her bidding.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid," said the man, stepping out of the shadow.

"You're not so scared of Bekothrie, I notice," he added with meaning.

"He is the master!" faltered the girl, her face flushing painfully, wondering whether the fellow had guessed her secret.

"Oh, of course," laughed Broom unpleasantly, and slyly edging nearer. "The master, and therefore a little tin god. But say," he added, taking a step or two boldly, "does he not kiss those pretty lips occasionally, and embrace that tight little waist, eh?"

"Why should he?" asked the girl stupidly, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Why should he?" repeated Broom, chuckling.

"Why indeed! Why, because he is human, my dear, and can no more resist the fascination of your pretty face and figure than I can." Kasba remembered how easily Roy had resisted her that very day and, despite the terror she was feeling, smiled bitterly. While the fellow had been speaking he had craftily reduced the space between them, and now, encouraged by the girl's silence, he tried to clasp her about the waist. But the action worked upon the girl like magic. There was too much of the fighting blood of her warrior ancestors in her to allow her to be terrified for long, and though her expression of strong aversion never changed, she stopped trembling and with perfect calmness skilfully eluded his grasp. His arm encircled the empty air and he swore under his breath. "Oh, you needn't try to be so confoundedly coy," he cried, baffled for the moment. "Come, sweetheart," he added, waxing passionate and insinuating and again edging toward her, "I'm in love with you and shall sleep all the better for a kiss from those red lips.

"Back, Ball-eye," cried the girl, her eyes flashing and her lips curled in scorn. "I do not like you. Why do you persist in troubling me when I dislike you and try to keep aloof?"

Somewhat staggered, the fellow gnawed savagely at his moustache. "Bah!" he exclaimed at last.

"I do not like you," continued the girl staunchly. "There is something here," she added, touching her breast, "that tells me that you are a very wicked man and will bring trouble upon us all."

"And I, my pretty divinator, have something here," retorted the man, tapping his breast in imitation of her, "that tells me that you are a canting little hypocrite, and, by God, I will have that kiss!" With that he took a step toward her, then stopped and stared hard at the girl, who stood silent and immobile as a statue, facing her tormentor with no apparent fear. She did not even start on hearing the threat, but on the contrary faced him boldly, her foot planted firmly, looking him steadily in the eye. Then deliberately she drew a long knife from her bosom and, grasping it tightly, held it ready for use. She eyed him grimly, and softly chuckled. Her terror was gone.

The fellow fell back, sullen, foiled. Kasba's fearless attitude utterly disconcerted him, and he blasphemed till the girl shuddered and turned her back and moved away. But her face was no sooner turned than a very strange expression came on Broom's, and rushing after her, he cried in a loud, angry voice: "Not so fast, you little wildcat. You shall pay me for those false smiles."

Suddenly a boy's clear voice rang out on the still night air.

"*Kas-ba-a, yu-cuz-zie, yu-cuz-zie Kas-ba-a!*"

With a smothered imprecation the man stopped dead in his tracks. Then at the sound of someone approaching he dropped hurriedly back into the shadow. Suddenly an idea crossed his mind. He stood a moment chewing his moustache thoughtfully, and nodding his head once or twice. "I'll do it," he muttered.

When Roy entered the house, after giving Delgezie a few supplies from the store, he was astonished to find Broom had not come in; apparently he must be outside talking to Sahanderry or Minnihak. Dismissing the matter from his mind, he turned to Delgezie, who had followed to make his report.

Throwing back his hood, Delgezie displayed a pleasant, wrinkled face. But there was the sad, wistful expression in his eyes of one who has experienced some overwhelming sorrow, and yet was conscientiously striving to live out his life bravely despite it. He seated himself at a nod from his master, who plied him with questions relative to the trip. It had been a very successful one. They had brought back a good haul of furs.

"And Acpa?" questioned Roy presently, referring to one of his Eskimo traders.

"His boy's sick," said Delgezie.

"What's the matter with him?"

"Oh, he met with an accident. His father shot him in the leg; the gun went off accidentally."

"Hurt him much?"

"Yes, completely shattered the bone below the knee."

"What are they doing to it?"

"They've tied a piece of shaganappi tightly around the leg, above the wound."

"What in the world for?" asked Thursby, in blank surprise.

"Oh, the line will cut through the flesh," said Delgezie, unmoved, "and the lower part will rot off, clean off."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the other. "Is that possible?"

"Yes. The greater part of the flesh below the shaganappi is off already."

"How ghastly!" said the trader, with a slight shudder. "But the boy?"

"Oh, he's lively enough."

"Well, well! we live and learn," said Thursby. "What would a doctor say of such primitive surgery?" he wondered. "But there, I won't keep you any longer," he added.

The old man got to his feet instantly. With a cheerful "Good-night, sir," he left the room. Outside he was joined by Minnihak, and the two proceeded to Delgezie's hut together. On the way they met an Eskimo woman, whom they passed with a slight greeting.

With characteristic curiosity she turned and watched them. She was a "runner." A band of Eskimo had found it impossible to reach the post that day and had sent her on in advance to get the usual gratuity of *tee-pli-tow* (tobacco) and carry it back to them.

The old Chipewyan's face brightened when he approached his humble home, where a pale light welcomed him from the window. He lifted the catch softly, while a look of pleased anticipation stole over his face, for was he not to see his only child whom he loved better than anything on all God's earth? He had been away from her many days—long, weary days, haunted by the fearful dread that he might

return to find her gone, as her mother had gone years before. For there was a tragedy in the old man's life. Leaving his wife in the best of health, he had gone on a trip to an Indian encampment, and had returned to find her dead and buried. She had died of some contagious disease. This was a terrible blow to him, for he loved her fondly. He had shortly before embraced the Christian faith, and this great affliction—this taking away of all he loved best on earth—tried the simple-hearted man sorely. It seemed monstrously unjust. He probably could not have put his feelings into words, but that was what he felt. It was hard for him to believe in a God who could do this thing—a God whom the missionary invariably presented as a "God of love." What had he done to deserve such misery? All that was just and righteous in the gentle-minded man rose up in revolt. And was this to be wondered at? How many of us so-called highly-civilized people have not at some time or other questioned the wisdom of God with infinitely less cause? Well, then, may we sympathize with this poor, uneducated, half-pagan Indian. The bereaved man's grief was terrible to witness. For days he sat disconsolate and desolate, moaning to himself, and neither eating nor sleeping. When the missionary called to comfort him, he rose slowly to his feet and in a voice that cut the preacher to the heart cried: "My wife, where is she?" Then with a sweep of the arm to take in the whole of his tribe, he asked: "Was there no other woman your God could take?" The missionary, greatly dis-

tressed, felt that the kindest thing he could do was to go away. Time passed on and the poor fellow again took up his accustomed duties. But he was never afterwards the same man. He never forgot his dead wife and secretly and sincerely mourned her all the rest of his days. He never took another, but showered all the love of his bruised heart upon his orphaned child, and never left the Fort without an overwhelming fear that something might happen to his treasure while he was away. But he was home again now and all was well. The *com-it-uk* had claimed most of his attention when he had driven up to the Fort, but his eyes nevertheless sought eagerly for Kasba, whom he discovered standing meekly in the background after her wont, ready to carry his "bag" to the house. They had not yet spoken, for Kasba never intruded herself when Bekothrie was nigh. She knew her father's work came first. But she was inside the house, he well knew, to welcome him; and never did a lover's heart flutter and throb as did the heart of this poor old home-coming Indian father.

True to his expectations, his daughter was waiting for him within. She was standing by the stove. Instantly the girl's face glowed with pleasure, and with a little cry of delight she flew to him and, encircling his neck with her arms, drew his face down on a level with her own, and gazed searchingly into it for a moment, as if to see whether he had taken any harm during his long absence. The old man gave a short, contented laugh, then his feelings welled

up within him and tears of joy gleamed in his eyes. Reluctantly putting her from him, he took off his out-door garments while Kasba greeted the Eskimo and flew back to the stove, on which a pot was boiling merrily. A savory smell filled the room but the old man remarked it not. His eyes were following his daughter's movements with the wistful gaze of loving solicitude. He paused in the act of drying his hands on a coarse towel to smile whenever his eyes caught hers in her flittings. His ablutions completed, Kasba helped him into his jacket. Then, taking him by the shoulder she playfully forced him to a seat. The Eskimo seated himself at the table at a gesture from Kasba, and soon food was set before the men. Hardly a word was exchanged between them, and in a marvellously short space of time they had finished supper and were feeling for their pipes. Fumbling in one pocket after another, Delgezie pulled out pipe, knife and a plug of nigger-head from profound depths. Then he proceeded to cut up enough of the tobacco to fill his pipe. Minnihak produced his *pu-lu-yet-ti* (pipe) from his fire-bag and with scrupulous carefulness filled its little black bowl with a mixture of tobacco and a particular kind of weed which grows among the rocks in the vicinity.

This *pu-lu-yet-ti* had been fashioned from soft stone and ornamented with little brass bands in a manner and after a pattern peculiar to the Eskimo. The stem was of wood and frequently renewed. But the old stems were never thrown away; they were

hoarded up against a tobacco famine when they would be cut up very fine and smoked.

The two men smoked in silence. Minnihak drew lovingly at his pipe long after the little bowl was empty. Then with a deep sigh of regret he reluctantly put it away, and drawing his *kaip-puk* (deerskin robe) over him, he stretched himself on the floor to sleep.

Her duties completed, Kasba sat down beside her father.

" The boy's asleep," said Delgezie, with an indicative thrust of the chin in the direction of a recumbent figure in a corner of the room.

" Yes," laughed the girl, with a glance in the same direction. " Poor David, he tried to keep awake, but he was so very tired. He was away on the ' big hill ' hunting, all day. He shot three deer."

" Oh!" ejaculated the old man with a nod and smile of approbation.

" We're going for them to-morrow," she explained, taking her father's hand and smoothing it fondly.

Just then the door opened and Broom appeared. He hesitated on the threshold, glancing from one to the other as if asking permission to enter. Kasba half started up from her seat at sight of him. She experienced a feeling of resentful surprise, wondering what his visit might portend.

The old man bade him enter, though he seemed rather taken aback at the fellow's presence. The welcome obviously lacked fervor.

Nothing daunted, Broom came forward with a peculiar smile on his lips.

Kasba rose hastily and placed a seat for him, then turned deliberately away, withdrawing to another part of the room, and for the time being appeared totally absorbed in some kind of needlework.

"Well, old man," said Broom, breaking the strained silence, "what sort of a trip did you have?"

"Pretty fair, sir," Delgezie made brief reply. Then he nervously moved his hands and his eyes went to the girl. Delgezie certainly looked upon Broom with much disfavor. Suddenly he straightened up a little and looked the sailor full in the face. "What do you want?" he demanded bluntly.

Broom appeared a trifle confused by this direct question. He glanced at the girl before answering, then: "Oh, nothing much?" he said.

Delgezie nodded doubtfully, his eyes fastened on the fellow's face. Something in his manner had startled and displeased him.

Conversation lagged.

The intruder fidgeted uneasily under the old man's solemn scrutiny. He changed his position several times. Then he suddenly produced a cigar and offered it to the old man, who refused it point blank.

"No thank you," said the old fellow, with grim brevity, "I'm used to the pipe."

Broom bit off the end of the rejected cigar savagely, and sticking it into his mouth applied a match. Again he glanced at the girl.

This time Delgezie caught the direction of his glance and instinctively his attention was alert. A shade of uneasiness came into his eyes; his mind was filled with vague alarms. With puckered brows he sat silently watchful and suspicious.

To Kasba the constraint became unbearable. She softly opened the door and went out. The closing of the door was the first warning Broom received of it.

He turned half round and sat for a few moments in a listening attitude. Then he turned back, and leaning forward toward Delgezie, "Look here, old man," he said, laughing oddly, "what I've come to see you about is this: I want your girl—" He left the sentence unfinished; there was that in the old man's face that caused him to stop.

For Delgezie had turned white, his lower jaw dropped, his eyes set in a fixed, horrified stare; he breathed heavily. So paralyzed was he at the news that he lost his faculties. Something like a groan escaped his lips.

"You—want—my—daughter!" he gasped, at length.

"Yes, I do," replied Broom, mercilessly, with another odd laugh. "I'm in love with her. Course I can't marry her properly here, we haven't a parson; but I'm going south first open water and will take her along. We can get hitched up then, at Churchill. In the meantime an Indian marriage will have to do."

The look in the old man's honest eyes caused Broom's to wander.

"Well," said the old fellow shakily, "I can't give you my girl. She's all I've got." His voice broke and a tear showed on his cheek. "Besides," he added, pulling himself together, "you don't love her; you say you do, but by and by—"

"I know what you mean. You mean I would grow tired of her and throw her off."

"Yes," said the brave old Indian, slowly, "that's what I mean."

Broom laughed harshly. "You're candid, at any rate, old man; but you're wrong. Besides, how do you know that the girl don't want me?"

"You can ask her yourself, in front of me," replied Delgezie with honest indignation. And rising slowly, he crossed the room and went out. Broom heard the old man's voice in conversation outside for a few moments, then he returned, leaving the door ajar behind him.

Soon after, the girl came in. "Well!" she said quietly, yet with a touch of defiance in her voice, and facing Broom boldly. Her eyes were wide and flashing, her lips compressed. She looked at him in a manner which despite himself caused him to feel somewhat abashed and his face to crimson.

The fellow semed too confused to speak for a moment. Then: "I've been asking your father for you, Kasba," he said, somewhat brusquely, as if intending to carry off the matter with a high hand.

The girl displayed no surprise. She looked him squarely in the face for a moment, then: "Do you

mean that you wish to *marry* me?" she asked with rather marked emphasis.

"Well, I would; but I can't, very well," he explained. "I'd do it fast enough, but there ain't any parson here. I reckon you'd think a sky-pilot necessary—" He paused and looked at her searchingly.

But she would not help him. She stood grimly silent, gazing at him with an inscrutable face.

He shifted uneasily under the intensity of her gaze. Her attitude stirred his wrath. Who in the world was she that she should put on airs? She had been spoilt. Just because she was pretty she had been petted and made much of! But—just wait! D——her!

"Still we could get married—" he continued, as she did not speak.

The girl's lip curled, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"According to *native* custom," she finished scornfully. "Oh!" There was great significance in the exclamation. She threw back her head proudly, and her nostrils widened. She surveyed him from head to foot in one sweeping glance of contempt.

Broom smiled. It was a disagreeable smile and his brows lowered. There came an unpleasant glint in his eye.

Going to her father, who had resumed his seat, she knelt down beside him. The old man took her hand and held it tightly. "Father," she said firmly,

"I shall never marry in that fashion. You would not wish me to do so?"

The staunch old fellow shook his head decidedly. "No, my child," said the downright old fellow. "We are Indians, it's true; but we are also Christians. No, I do not wish it, nor would I allow it." There was much righteous indignation in his voice.

"Christians!" sneered Broom, in a manner so diabolical that it is quite beyond power of description. "*Fine* Christians, I'm sure. But I'm up to your little game. You think to make a fine lady of the girl, eh? She's throwing herself at Thursby's head, and if—"

"Stop!" commanded Delgezie, sternly. Gently disengaging himself from the girl, he got to his feet. Raised to his full height, he looked upon the slanderer with a face which, in truth, was fearful. His eyes brightened into clear and perfect fire. He stood, a concentration of scorn, contempt, hatred the most intense; pouring upon the dastardly villain an unbroken stream of withering fury that was dreadful to look upon. His daughter, in fact, was obliged to speak twice before she could arrest his attention.

"Father! father!" she pleaded. She was greatly frightened. She had never seen this kind-hearted old man in such a fierce passion before.

At the sound of the girl's voice, Delgezie partly recovered himself. The anger went slowly out of his face, leaving it grim and stern. "You have received your answer," he said with dignity. "You have no right to insult us. Please go." With that he resumed his seat.

But Broom was angry, too. For an instant he had a wicked desire to seize the girl and carry her off. but he could not do this without being followed and brought back, and his punishment would be severe. Roy had already declared himself on that score. Besides there would be this fiery old father to deal with.

"I'll have her yet," said Broom, starting to take his leave, "I swear it!"

At the door he turned and glanced maliciously back at the girl, then laughing discordantly he strode out, banging the door behind him.

Then a great, horrible fear seizing Delgezie seemed to still the beating of his heart. For Broom had sworn that he would possess Kasba. Broom was a white man, and white men always got what they set their hearts upon; that is, when dealing with Indians. At least, such was Delgezie's experience. He must consult Bekothrie. Yet it seemed a silly thing to make a fuss about. It was no insult to offer a girl marriage, and, if pressed by Bekothrie, Broom would undoubtedly construe his offer as such. Besides the fellow had been refused, and that should end the matter, and probably would, when he had had time to recover from his ruffled feelings. If he then refused to take the rejection in good part and continued to annoy the girl with his attentions, it would then be time to complain to Bekothrie. So argued the old fellow, who was not a little shrewd in his way.

"Do you like that man, my girl?" he asked with exceeding tenderness.

"I don't, and never shall," Kasba replied firmly. "And oh, father, I never want to leave you. You are the best father any girl ever had." Then with a laugh she kissed him.

He put his hand up and stroked her cheek.

"When the time comes, little girl, and the right man asks, your father won't refuse him," Delgezie assured her in his slow, thoughtful way. "But in God's name let it be a man of your own kind, an Indian. You were trained in the white man's ways, and taught to read and write English, but you are still an Indian, my dear; nothing could alter that. You are what the good God intended you should be—a Chipewyan Indian girl; and to be ashamed of it would be to doubt His wisdom. But there," he added hastily, trying to hide his emotion, "you are going to the 'big hill' to-morrow, so must be off to bed. Give me the books." He drew the lamp toward him as if to obtain more light to read by, but in reality his poor old eyes were dim with tears.

Kasba sprang to her feet and brought two Chipewyan books, a hymn and a prayer book. These she handed to her father, who fumbled at the leaves of the hymn-book for some moments with a thoughtful frown. Then suddenly, "*A Neolt ye sesal naothat da*" (Abide with me), he sang in a thin, tremulous voice. Kasba joined in the hymn, but in subdued tones, fearing to wake David, who moved uneasily.

The pair then fell on their knees and Delgezie read the "general confession," concluding with "*Neta Yaka thenda nese*" (Our Father, who art).

Long after her father's deep breathing told her that he was asleep, Kasba lay gazing at a shaft of moonlight that pierced the small window. Her mind dwelt with bitterness on the harshness of her situation: Broom's persistent attentions; Roy's indifference to her love; and her promise to Sahanderry necessitated important changes in her life. In future she must no longer roam the Fort unattended; no longer spend the quiet hours thinking of Bekothrie. Instead, she must always be accompanied in her ramblings, must think of Bekothrie no more, and accept Sahanderry as her lover.

CHAPTER V.

AN ESKIMO CONJURER AND A PUGILISTIC ENCOUNTER.

Early next morning Roy was in the inner room making a protracted search for the store key, which had mysteriously disappeared from the nail on which it had hung the night before. Suddenly discontinuing his efforts, he strode into the kitchen.

Sahanderry was standing near the door in earnest conversation with Kasba, who had apparently just arrived with a message from her father. Squatted beside the stove was the Eskimo, Ocpic.

Roy nodded to the girl, who discreetly drew aside, then questioned Sahanderry, who instantly assured him of his total ignorance of the matter.

Still pondering over the disappearance of the key, Roy suddenly raised his eyes and encountered those of Ocpic, who was watching him keenly. In a flash Roy perceived the culprit.

He glanced searchingly at the Eskimo, who returned the look with an inscrutable face.

Roy smiled and flashed a glance at Sahanderry, who was standing with a puzzled expression, gazing from one to the other of them. The Chipewyan's brain worked slowly, ponderously. It was some

little time before a suspicion of what was in the other's mind dawned upon him.

Roy beckoned him with a slight movement of the head and then went outside. The Indian lingered for a few moments before following with an awkward attempt at careless ease.

"It was Ocpic," declared Roy, vehemently, without preamble, as Sahanderry joined him. "Of course it was he! I left him in the room with the sailor when I went out to Delgezie, and the sailor followed. But you," he demanded quickly with a wrathful look, "what were you thinking of that you allowed the Eskimo to stay alone in the room?"

The delinquent dropped his head guiltily, expecting a storm.

"Now go in," continued the speaker peremptorily. "Try to keep Ocpic in the kitchen while I fix up a plan to get the key away from him."

The servant acquiesced gladly, and quickly disappeared into the house. Roy followed more leisurely. He spoke jocosely to Kasba as he passed through the kitchen.

On reaching the inner room he threw himself into a chair to form his plans to outwit the Eskimo. In the dilemma his knowledge of the native character stood him in good stead.

A feasible way presenting itself, he called the Eskimo forward.

Ocpic entered with a solemn face. There was a menacing gleam in his eye. Roy knew at a glance that the native's suspicions were aroused; that he

was prepared to deny any knowledge of the key with mule-like obstinacy. It had been mislaid by himself, Roy explained, or it had dropped from his pocket, as the case might be. Ocpic had often boasted of his feats as a conjurer. Let him find the key and the trader would consider him as clever as he made himself out to be.

The Eskimo hesitated. The trader twitted him with his incapability as a conjurer, laughing at his hesitation to comply with such a simple request. However, if Ocpic refused to find the key, he had only to change the lock on the store door and the key would be of no use to anyone.

Ocpic glanced searchingly at Roy, but his face had assumed such a bland, innocent expression that any suspicion Ocpic might have had was instantly allayed.

The Eskimo was now on his mettle. He felt his reputation as a conjurer at stake. He hesitated a moment longer while the thought of the change of locks sank into his brain. He had instantly perceived that the stolen key would then be of no use to him, and so, his face assuming his old simple, ingratiating smile, he gave a ready assent.

He would bring his conjuring belt, he said, and left the room.

The trader laughed inwardly.

After a short absence Ocpic again presented himself. He held a large *kaip-puk* (deerskin robe) in his hand and wore around his waist a belt of string, to which rags of different material and color and

sundry tiny parchment ornaments had been attached. This belt was the insignia of his office.*

Entering the room, Ocpic made arrangements for the coming performance with the profoundest gravity, while the trader watched him with a twinkle of amusement in his eye.

The native seemed to have some difficulty in finding a suitable spot on the floor, but at length chose a place near the door, where he squatted down, drawing the *kaip-puk* over his head and completely enveloping himself therewith. When this was accomplished to his own satisfaction, he began a mumbled incantation, interspersed with much scratching on the floor.

The conjurer's voice swelled into a loud song as the ceremony progressed. The *kaip-puk* heaved, while the figure beneath seemed to be engaged in a violent struggle, presumably with some turbulent spirit.

Meanwhile the noise made by Ocpic had gradually stirred Broom's senses. He slowly awoke, raised himself on one elbow, and gazed at the heaving *kaip-puk* as if fascinated. He brushed his hand across his eyes sharply as if to make sure he was thoroughly awake, then threw another hasty, startled glance in

*In order to become a conjurer an Eskimo isolates himself in a tent and neither eats nor drinks for fifteen days, when a spirit comes and shakes him by the hand. This handshaking once performed he is a conjurer. Henceforth he is supposed to hold an army of attendant spirits at his beck and call: he can cause a lost article to be found; a person to recover from an illness or the reverse; and a hundred and one things equally astounding to happen.

the same direction. Presently he smiled grimly as the import of the scene grew clear to him. After watching the Eskimo's struggles for some moments longer, Broom dropped his legs over the side of the bunk and sat in a stooping position. He was occupying the lower bunk and the limited space above would not allow him to sit upright. He then noticed Roy's presence for the first time.

"What's the bally performance?" he inquired, catching a glance from the trader.

"Oh, I've lost the key of the trading store, and Ocpic's finding it for me," responded Roy. The conjurer was still enveloped in the *kaip-puk,* and, taking advantage of this, the speaker closed an eye.

Broom's eye twinkled. "Ah," he said significantly with a smile and a meaning glance at the struggling bulk, which was now undergoing astounding evolutions.

A moment later a tremendous upheaval occurred and the Eskimo's head appeared. He sat blinking at Roy, his overheated countenance perspiring profusely.

"The spirit wants to know what kind of key it is," he said breathlessly.

"A big key," returned the trader, illustrating its length with his two index fingers.

Ocpic nodded comprehendingly, gazed seriously around the room for a moment, then, taking a long breath, again disappeared.

The two white men glanced at each other and smiled.

"That fellow's *some* conjurer," asserted Broom, whose voice seemed to betray a considerable appreciation of the ludicrous element in the incident.

"He sure is," said Roy, with a broad grin; "the best in the land."

Broom started to laugh, but a sharp look from Roy turned it to a prolonged yawn.

The conjurer's previous herculean efforts were mere child's play compared to the superhuman display that followed. The intervals of scratching became continuous, the incantations swelled into a roar and the twisting figure beneath the *kaip-puk* worked itself into a frenzy. Then suddenly all was still and a closed hand pushed itself out through the covering. The grimy fingers and the thumb slowly opened, disclosing the wards of a large key.

"Is that the key?" asked a muffled voice from beneath the *kaip-puk*.

"Yes," replied Roy without moving from his seat to examine the thing in the extended hand.

The fingers and thumb closed back on the object and the hand again disappeared. Ocpic's voice was then heard in conversation. After a time the attendant spirits were, apparently, dismissed, for the figure arose. The *kaip-puk* fell to the floor in a heap and the Eskimo stood revealed, smiling and perspiring. With a proud look he held a large key extended on his open palm. The trader slowly took it, then, like a flash, his expression of careless indifference disappeared and his face took on a look of implacable wrath. Reaching for the fallen *kaip-puk* he hurled

it into the kitchen as far as he could throw it; then turning to the Eskimo, he grasped him firmly by the shoulder.

"You're a thief," he cried. "You stole the key." With this he gave the astonished Ocpic a shake which nearly sent him off his feet. "If ever I find you in this room again I will shoot you," he added sternly. "Now go." Ocpic breathed heavily, his face worked passionately, then suddenly he gave a loud shout. Hatred, the implacable hatred of a coward, flashed from his eyes as he did so.

As if by magic the doorway was filled with angry faces. A number of Eskimos shuffled in and made an effort to draw near to Ocpic.

Quietly Broom dropped from the bunk to the floor. Deliberately he reached for a chair. Then he took his place beside Roy, balancing the chair in his hand.

Then a slight figure pressed itself through the group at the door. It was Kasba. Roy looked at her surprised, and smiled. Straightening herself, she faced Ocpic's allies with outstretched hand and eyes aflame and stood as if warning them back, a veritable little fury. For a moment the Eskimos wavered, then they murmured together and moved as if to push past the girl.

Roy smiled grimly. He was conscious of feeling a slight exultation at the prospect of a conflict with the natives, for the old race antagonism was strong in him. He knew the moment of his life had come, that to show the least fear now was to lose command

over these people forever. All depended upon a bold front.

Abruptly he motioned Broom back. Then he gently brushed Kasba aside. Stern and fearless he strode up to Ocpic, who never moved a muscle. With blazing eyes Roy pointed to the door. He looked particularly big in his wrath.

"*Hilimee!*" (Go!), he barked. The command was not one to be ignored. He seemed with his stern visage and flashing eyes to be very earnest indeed.

There was a tense silence. The two men gazed fixedly into each other's eyes; then, as invariably happens, the native quailed before an unflinching outward manifestation of the stronger will. Ocpic's eyes dropped sullenly. He turned and shuffled out. The group at the door had already melted away, as silently as it had appeared.

Roy turned to speak to Kasba, but found her gone. The danger past, she had vanished. The two white men silently gripped hands.

A few minutes later Sahanderry appeared with a trembling, scared face; so terrified was he at what had just transpired that he quaked with terror. He kept muttering to himself while he laid the table for breakfast. Evidently he expected Ocpic to take summary vengeance by a murderous act similar to one of which he was already declared guilty.

Having recovered the key, Roy decided to go alone to the trading-store to ascertain the extent of Ocpic's peculations, and with this intention struggled into his hairy-coat and was about to leave the room when

an enamelled plate fell with a loud clatter from Sahanderry's trembling fingers to the floor. This drew Roy's attention to the Indian's state of extreme nervousness. He looked fixedly at him for a moment and then spoke.

"Sahanderry," he said in a voice that made the man addressed spin round as if shot.

"Bekothrie!" gasped the Indian.

The trader quietly held his gaze until the other had somewhat mastered his agitation, then:

"Don't be a fool," he added sharply.

These peremptory words, coupled with the speaker's perfect coolness, had the desired effect. Assuming courage borrowed from Roy's composure, Sahanderry continued his labors with less nervousness, but heavily and with scant interest.

Broom, who was feeling "as fresh as a daisy," returned to his seat on the edge of the bunk, where he sat warbling scraps of songs of questionable morality in a harsh, grating voice, like the rasping of dull metal, beating a tattoo meanwhile with the heels of his naked feet and throwing Sahanderry an occasional glance to see how he was appreciating these efforts.

Strange to say, Sahanderry was far from being offended at the levity of the singer, and hovered about the table with an approving smile on his dark face long after he had completed his duties. Perceiving his apparent interest, Broom threw himself into the attitude of a preacher and with inscrutable

face severely lectured the Indian on his indiscretion in listening.

"You are a hardened sinner, my man," he declared sharply. "Mind what you are about, or you will come to a bad end."

This admonition discomfited Sahanderry for the moment, then he threw the incorrigible Broom a look of infinite scorn and abruptly walked out with his head in the air.

Left alone, the other delivered himself of a rattling chorus as a grand finale, then, dropping on his feet, he pulled on his clothes with a dexterity almost incredible. In a few moments Mr. Broom was dressed and out of doors.

After breakfast the trader rose from the table and paced the room restlessly. "That packet!" he murmured, sighing a little. "How I wish it would turn up. For some unaccountable reason my fiancée's letters missed connection last mail; I haven't heard from her for a year."

"What, a whole twelve months!" cried his companion with a theatrical start of horror. "A year without a 'billy-doo.' What a calamity!"

Roy made a playful lunge, which the other skilfully avoided, then, laughing good-naturedly at Broom's banter, he attired himself and went out, but he did not remain out of doors long, quickly returning and wandering listlessly about the place during the rest of the morning. He was too anxious about the "packet" to attend his traps or settle himself to anything about the Fort.

Broom made himself comfortable and began to read the book he had laid aside on the previous day. But as time went on he put it down and endeavored to attract the trader's attention by making significant signs and gestures, such as filling an invisible vessel from an imaginary bottle, lifting his hand to his mouth and going through the motions of drinking with evident gusto, and swallowing an indefinite quantity of something with an appreciative smack of the lips. These pantomimic efforts failing, he coughed spasmodically, then uttered sundry vague half sentences, among which "An eye-opener," "Throat as dry as a lime-kiln," "A hair of the dog that bites you," could be plainly distinguished, and all these attempts at effecting a "liquor up" being abortive, he came abruptly to the point with a hint there was no mistaking.

"What about a drink?" he asked with an ingratiating smile.

But the trader was gazing out through the window, his thoughts far away, and Broom was obliged to repeat his words with emphasis before Thursby became aware that he was speaking.

Then, "Eh!" he ejaculated, turning sharply and collecting his errant thoughts with an effort. "I beg pardon, Broom. I was thinking, and your words passed over me."

"Oh, I was merely inquiring whether there was a 'shot left in the locker,'" grumbled Broom.

The other laughed, paused irresolutely, then set a bottle and enamelled mug on the table. Broom

eyed these proceedings with manifest satisfaction. But perceiving there was but one mug he raised his eyebrows and glanced significantly from the mug to Roy and back to the mug again.

Roy shook his head and smiled. "No," he said, "it's too early." He waited until Broom had helped himself, then again placed the bottle under lock and key.

Broom shrugged his shoulders at this caution. He screwed his face into an extravagant expression of dismay, then, changing his expression suddenly, he emptied the mug at a gulp.

Buttoning his coat and drawing his cap well down, Roy went out to take another look for the packet. Broom followed Roy to the door with his eyes, then took up the mug and looked into it as if to see whether by any possible chance a drop had been left in the bottom. Raising it to his lips, he drained the few remaining drops, then finding he could squeeze no more out of it, replaced the mug and settled himself to read.

Meanwhile, Sahanderry, trying to appear at ease, was in the kitchen preparing dinner. He broke off short in a song to glance at Ocpic who was squatting in a corner, watching him from beneath lowered brows. Mustering courage, Sahanderry again burst forth, but only managed two lines before his courage again failed him. His song stopped abruptly; he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a hand that trembled; his eyes rolled in their sockets, and his hair stood on end more than usual. Then

he laughed the short mirthless laugh of a man who was afraid.

At this juncture the door opened and Delgezie appeared, accompanied by Minnihak, and Sahanderry's face brightened instantly. He greeted the newcomers with effusion. Feeling that he had a sympathetic confidant in Delgezie, he related the story of the stolen key. But the old man evidently was made of "sterner stuff." He listened to the tale with the keenest attention and at first looked puzzled, then astonished, then fierce and wrathful.

The story was no sooner finished than Delgezie called Minnihak to him and, despite Sahanderry's protests, and his own limited knowledge of the Eskimo language, he acquainted him with what had occurred.

Minnihak nodded twice after the old man had finished speaking, as if to let him know that he perfectly understood, then, walking across the kitchen, he squatted down a few feet in front of Ocpic and sat gazing fixedly at him.

Ocpic, no whit abashed, returned the look.

After some moments of silence, "You're a thief!" said Minnihak sharply, and there was a prolonged wait. The two Eskimo glared fiercely at each other, Ocpic's breath came quickly, and his eyes glittered evilly. At length he got slowly to his feet.

The other did likewise and, standing silently, the two men continued their fixed stare.

Presently Ocpic deliberately threw off his coat and shirt and again Minnihak leisurely followed suit.

Then, still in perfect silence, they straightened themselves, and, standing naked to the waist, prepared for a pugilistic encounter.

Stationing themselves at arm's length the belligerents stood firm, and Ocpic, considering himself the better man, allowed his opponent the first blow and placed himself in the required position to receive it. With left arm drawn tight against his side and the shoulder pushed well forward, he stood offering the other a fair opportunity to strike his exposed biceps.

Minnihak paused a moment, as if mustering his strength, then, with a swinging blow, he struck. The blow was received with a grim smile, and the arm fell into its natural position, proclaiming the recipient ready to take his revenge.

Drawing himself up, Minnihak then offered the muscles of his arm for sacrifice. Ocpic brought his fist round with a wicked swing and struck a mighty blow. Minnihak winced visibly. Ocpic smiled grimly and drew back into position again.

There was now a few minutes interval of quiet, during which Broom entered the kitchen.

"Hullo! You giddy gamecocks," he cried, "What's the row?"

Delgezie hastened to explain and the sailor seated himself to enjoy the fight.

It was a novel scene. The daylight straggled through the frosted windows and lit the room dimly. The combatants breathed heavily. Delgezie leaned against the table with an anxious look on his bronzed face. He was feeling a little apprehensive for Minni-

hak's safety. Sahanderry clung to the old man in abject terror. He was viewing an Eskimo fight for the first time and the heavy, resounding blows appeared fearfully blood-thirsty compared to the milder hair-pulling battles of his own race. Broom sat smiling and contemptuous.

The pugilists again took positions and more hard blows were given and received. These proceedings were repeated several times. Ocpic accepted his punishment carelessly, but Minnihak was showing signs of fatigue. He was clearly getting the worst of it. After a few more exchanges upon the arms, Ocpic threw his head to one side, offering his cheek for a mark, and the other drew himself together and made laudable efforts to gain the victory, but his blow lacked force, and all felt that the fight was over when it became Ocpic's turn to strike. Their fears were well grounded. Ocpic struck his opponent low down upon the jaw. The blow had a touch of the uppercut, and Minnihak staggered and fell to the floor, where he lay for a few moments blinking confusedly. Then he slowly got to his feet. Ocpic stood watching him closely, but Minnihak had evidently had enough. He crossed over to where his clothes were lying and started to pull on his shirt. This was the act of a vanquished man. Ocpic smiled exultantly at each of the spectators in turn, then followed the example of his opponent. Their toilets completed, the two Eskimos squatted on the floor close together and filled their pipes from the victor's fire-bag as if nothing unusual had happened.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST IN THE DRIFTING SNOW.

While the incorrigible Mr. Broom was sitting on his bunk making prodigious efforts at harmony, David and Kasba were preparing to fetch the deer that had fallen to the boy's gun on the previous day. The sled was brought to the door and packed with sundry cooking utensils, and, this completed, David drew the wrapper together and lashed it with a clap-match line, tucking his rifle and axe under the lashing at the top of the load to be handy in case of need.

Meanwhile Kasba caught and harnessed the dogs, and everything being ready, she started off at a quick walk. Barking joyfully, the dogs bounded after, while David sat astride the loaded sled, laughing and jubilant.

Mile after mile was accomplished in this manner till the sun peeped over the horizon, and Kasba, bethinking herself of breakfast, slackened her pace, keeping a wary eye for a suitable place for a halt. After journeying a short distance she came to a place where there were sufficient spruce trees and enough dry wood for their purpose.

Stopping suddenly, she turned and called to the dogs, who required no encouragement to increase their efforts. The girl's act was significant: they

knew exactly what was about to happen. With lolling tongues and panting breath they reached the girl and threw themselves down to snatch the few minutes' rest which they knew would be allowed them.

David dropped from the sled to his feet, took his axe and attacked a few dead spruce trees while Kasba, obedient to Indian custom, made a fire and put a kettle on the burning embers. Contrary to the old proverb that " a watched pot never boils," the water in this kettle was soon bubbling, and the two young people sank upon the brush which David had strewn beside the fire, eating their scanty breakfast with eager relish. The meal did not occupy many minutes, however, and they were soon on their way again.

The morning was bright, and the cold acted as a stimulant on the two. Kasba walked quickly over the snow with easy, buoyant steps, gazing on the monotonous scene with eager eyes. The branches of the spruce had taken unto themselves a covering of white, sparkling crystals which easily outvied in beauty the trees' natural verdure. Large flocks of willow partridges ran about on the smooth white crust or delved into the snow, occasionally disappearing into the thickest part of the scrub for safety when a partridge-hawk hovered ominously over them. The sky was blue and cloudless save for a few white fleeces floating low down upon the horizon. The air was clear and still. A cut track led through the thicker part of the scrub to a lake two or three miles in width. Half way across this icebound lake the dogs espied a number of deer grouped together, not

far to the right, watching their progress; with a lightning-like movement the leader diverged from the straight course and made toward the deer, which, perceiving no danger, were now calmly approaching the objects of their curiosity. But after drawing quite close they made a sudden retrograde movement, then ran around in circles. At intervals they stopped in their course to scrutinize the dogs anew.

As the dogs started on their wild rush after the deer, Kasba joined David in dragging on the headline, but even the combined efforts of the two had no effect in staying them.

Scenting danger, the deer soon made off at a long, easy trot with the dogs in wild pursuit, until the sled's coming in contact with a large block of ice threw Kasba forward, and she was dragged rapidly onward until, her arms growing tired, the line slipped from her grasp and the dogtrain quickly shot ahead.

Gathering herself up the girl stood looking after the disappearing sled with a rueful countenance and combined fellings of mortification and disgust at her ignominious position.

Meanwhile David was speeding over the ice in a manner calculated to break his neck, but a momentary delay occasioned by the sled colliding with the stump of a tree on the farther side of the lake gave him an opportunity to regain control of the dogs, which he halted, and then waited for Kasba to come up.

When the discomfited girl at length reached them David gazed at her mutely for a moment, then the

woeful expression on her face somehow tickled the boy's sense of humor and he burst into fit of loud laughter.

This sudden change from extreme gravity to boisterous gaiety startled Kasba, who stood for a moment irresolute, then threw herself beside him on the sled, laughing hysterically.

Presently, as David's wandering gaze became fixed upon the sky, his gaiety ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and he sat staring at the threatening storm-clouds which were silently creeping upward. Then, jumping hastily off the sled, he " drove up " his dogs with all vigor.

Kasba, shivering, drew the hood of her coat, which had slipped back during her frantic slide on the lake, upon her head with a quick pull, for a keen and cutting wind was rising, and started off at a quick trot in the direction pointed out by her companion.

Soon a large, dark heap, marked by a fluttering handkerchief tied to a stick, came into view. The girl divined that it was the object of their journey and ran straight toward it. As she approached a number of small white animals stood about it barking shrilly. They were the white foxes of the North, and appeared about to defend their position, but a nearer approach disconcerted them and they scuttled off to a safe distance, where they sat watching events. Not all, however, for David had set steel traps around the deer the day before, and a few foxes were caught.

The weather now looked ominous, and no time was lost in loading the sled with meat. The train was

then turned toward home, and Kasba started back against the wind with a resolute look on her small brown face. David urged the dogs along with loud cracks of the whip, for the wind had risen and was now rushing across the plain in a biting blast, while large dark clouds, which had suddenly appeared upon the horizon, spread rapidly over the sky like huge phantoms, extinguishing the sun in a veil of vapor. David adjured Kasba to make all speed and "drove up" his dogs with renewed energy. Hurrying on, they stopped for nothing, till presently the "little hill," which meant home, could be dimly seen in the distance.

The girl breathed a sigh of relief, for she realized that the Fort was only a few miles beyond the hill. But her comfort was short-lived. The wind, as if regretting its previous leniency toward them, now burst into a hurricane, and all sounds were drowned by its howlings, while the whirlwinds of snow which it raised filled the air and completely obscured objects a few yards distant.

As the storm cast its cutting ice-dust against David's face, he could not even see the dogs. He halted them and shouted loudly for Kasba to come back, then fired his rifle several times. He waited five minutes, ten minutes, but the moments passed and the girl did not appear. He walked forward as far as he dared, but returned immediately, for he could not see two paces from him and the drifting snow obliterated every footmark.

David paused irresolutely. He hated to proceed

without Kasba, yet he felt that to remain would be a useless sacrifice, for he was utterly helpless in such a blizzard. Besides, Kasba was walking in the right direction when last he saw her, and she might possibly stumble upon the Fort. It would be a miracle, he knew, but miracles did sometimes happen. Thus buoying up his hopes for Kasba's safety, he determined to trust to the sagacity of the dogs to take him home.

But the dogs were now lying down and showed a decided objection to the biting wind and drifting snow. Finding his efforts to make them draw the loaded sled of no avail, he hastily threw off the meat, and again endeavored to start them. Presently an idea of what their driver required seemed to dawn upon the dogs, and, their speed accelerated by a few sharp cuts of the whip, they started off so suddenly that they left David standing where he was; and it was only with the utmost difficulty that he caught them up and threw himself on the empty sled, where he lay prone upon his face, burying his head in the heavy sled wrapper.

If David's condition was precarious, Kasba's at the same time was even more perilous. Had she remained where she was when the hurricane burst upon them the dogs would have overtaken her, for they soon passed the spot on their way to the Fort. But, in her trepidation, she had endeavored to return to David, and this proved her undoing. The clouds of whirling snow thickened as she scudded along, a mere plaything for the wind. Then suddenly there was a

muffled shout and the girl turned quickly in the direction of the sound, and endeavored to reach the spot from whence it came. But the wind caught her again, driving her before it until she had totally lost any vague idea she had previously entertained concerning her position.

Notwithstanding this, she persevered. She walked till she was well assured that she had lost David in the drifting snow, then she turned, and made prodigious efforts to reach a place of shelter. By keeping the wind in her face, she felt that she was going in the right direction, but thick clouds of snow struck her at close intervals and prevented her from seeing a yard before her, while the force of the wind was such that it was almost impossible at times for her to stand upright against it.

To dream of reaching the Fort in such weather was simply madness, and the poor girl had no choice but to proceed at random with the slender hope of finding some shelter from the strength of the blizzard, and soon she felt that nothing short of a miracle could save her, and staggered forward with a prayer on her lips. But the thought of her poor old father's terrible grief should she perish in the cold, forced her onward and kept her weary legs from sinking beneath her. With the heroism of a martyr the girl endeavored to do for his sake what, as she felt, she had neither the will nor the strength to accomplish for her own, and she stood for a moment in dull despair, worn out by cold, fatigue and hunger, for she had eaten nothing since their hasty breakfast early that

morning. Nature called to her loudly to discontinue her arduous efforts and sink down upon the snow, but distracted though the girl was, she fully understood that should she succumb to the languor she was feeling, a little white mound would soon mark her last resting-place. Filial affection was strong within her, and with superhuman efforts she staggered forward. After half-an-hour's desperate struggle with the hurricane—half an hour which to her appeared like a century—the girl stumbled and fell. She quickly recovered herself but had not proceeded many steps before she fell again. This time the fall well-nigh deprived her of the little energy now left her, and it was with great difficulty that she regained her feet.

As she endeavored to shake off the numbing effects of the intense cold, she looked around her, gradually, carefully, and then for the first time she perceived that she was getting among rocks, and that it was the outlying boulders of these that had caused her to fall. Presently a ridge of rocks loomed through the drifting snow, seen during a lull in the gusts. This presented a welcome protection from the wind's icy blast, and uttering the glad cry of one suddenly rescued from what had appeared almost certain death, the girl staggered forward.

But the hurricane, as if angered at losing its lawful prey, seemed to rush upon her with greater force than ever. It almost dragged her away in its powerful grasp. Aroused by the imminence of the danger, Kasba made strenuous efforts to reach a projecting

rock, which stood up heroically to the furious tempest, offering its protection to the distressed girl. With a cry of relief she sank under its shelter. She was still in a most unenviable position, however, and was not slow to realize it.

After resting some moments, Kasba applied herself to prayer. In a few broken sentences she conveyed her thanks to God for His infinite mercy in rescuing her from the drifting snow. Then feeling assured that she had not been saved from the hurricane to perish miserably from cold and hunger, she turned her thoughts to the means of effecting her further escape.

Gazing around she tried to discover her whereabouts. A close scrutiny of the rock that sheltered her proved it to be a well-known landmark, and this sufficed to tell her that she was in a gully not far from the Fort. With this comforting assurance she proceeded to keep herself as warm as she might. Breaking some branches with much difficulty from a spruce tree that grew near-by, she laid them at the bottom of a hole in the rock. Then going out upon the plain she stood her snowshoes upright as a sign of her close proximity in case the worst befel and search was made for her body.

Returning to her haven of safety, Kasba drew off her hairy-coat, and, tying a handkerchief over her head, crouched in the hollow, drawing the coat over her in the manner of a blanket. Then she waited with a fortitude worthy of the sterner sex for the end of the hurricane; for she knew relief from the Fort was hardly possible till then.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE PACKET" AT LAST.

On the morning of the day on which Kasba and David were lost in the blizzard, Roy Thursby stood on a high ridge of rocks at the back of the Fort, gazing through a telescope at a minute speck in the distance. Was it his imagination, or did the object move? He gazed eagerly at it until his sight became blurred, and he was forced to drop the glass and give his eyes a rest. However, after a few minutes spent in excitedly wiping the lens of the telescope, he again applied it to his eye. Yes, the object did move, but —was he sure? Again he gazed long and earnestly, his feelings undergoing curious changes as they wavered between certainty and doubt. Then the object of his attention suddenly made a slight detour which was unmistakable. Roy uttered a wild whoop, shut the telescope with a snap and went scrambling down the rocks with the enthusiasm of a delighted schoolboy.

Long before he reached the Fort he fell to shouting, joyfully:

"Sahanderry! Sahanderry! Up with the flag!"

The kitchen door opened and Broom's face appeared.

"Where's the fire?" he enquired with a well-feigned look of terror.

"Fire be hanged! It's the 'packet,'" cried Roy exultantly, and in a lumbering fashion he cut a boyish caper on the loose snow.

Not to be outdone, Broom stepped from the doorway and began a grotesque performance which he called the Highland fling.

"Get out of it," cried Roy, giving him a push.

Broom paused with a leg poised gracefully in the air. "You're an unappreciative, cold-blooded Englishman," he exclaimed in an injured tone. "Why, I'm thinking of you, not of myself. I'm dancing with delight, my boy, sheer delight. You'll now be satiated with 'billy doos,'" and he performed a few more intricate steps.

"Stop your nonsense, man!" commanded Roy, while he laughed heartily at the man's antics. "But put on your coat and come out on the rocks."

Broom instantly stopped his piroueting, to disappear into the house and return shortly, struggling into his coat as he came.

"Now, my bold Sir Launcelot, my lovesick swain, we will proceed to watch the approach of Cupid's errant messenger."

With this he attempted to link his arm in Roy's, who promptly gave him a push which wellnigh precipitated him into an adjacent snowdrift.

Chatting merrily, the two men climbed the rocks till they arrived at the summit, where they stood gaz-

ing over the dazzling whiteness at the blot, which could easily be distinguished with the naked eye.

A number of dogs, scenting excitement, scampered about on top of the ridge of rocks, startling the *kasi-ba* (rock partridges), which flew up in flocks of great size. Near at hand Delgezie and Sahanderry scrambled up the eminence, while below Ocpic and Minnihak, accompanied by more dogs, were making prodigious efforts to join them. The flagstaff cut the sky-line sharply, and the flag, which had now been run up, fluttered merrily as if it, too, desired to welcome the weary " packet-men."

Within half-an-hour of their undignified scramble up the rocks they were precipitating themselves down again to welcome the arrivals, who were now close at hand.

It was only by the persistent efforts of the dog-driver and his companion that the " packet " sled was drawn to the summit of the snowdrift in front of the Fort, for the dogs were completely worn out. They staggered along, making heroic attempts to appear to the best advantage before strangers, but appearances were against them.

" Well, George Hopkins," said Roy, extending his hand, " I'm glad to see you."

" And we're right glad to get here, sir," answered Hopkins, drily. " The trip's been a hard one."

" Yes, I suppose it has," returned the trader with an approving glance at the plucky little half-breed who had accomplished the long, arduous journey. But Hopkins appeared to look on the trip as nothing

exceptionally hazardous; it was just a part of the work that his contract with the Hudson's Bay Company called for.

Hopkins' Eskimo companion, Poo-koo, next received Roy's attention, and just then Broom, who had been standing idly by, uttered a terrific yell as the dog-driver lifted the packet-box from under the sled wrapper. The package was a small and unimposing spectacle, covered with canvas; an insignificant object, indeed, to be carried such a number of miles at so great an expenditure of money and labor; but the importance of its contents and mission made up for its otherwise commonplace appearance, and such evidently was Hopkins' opinion, for he handled the box carefully and with great respect for its "honorable enclosures."

Roy turned sharply on his heel at the sailor's shout, and, perceiving what Hopkins had in his hand, he walked forward to take charge of it with as much unconcern as his excited state permitted him to assume. He was feeling a little piqued at the noise Broom was making. It was, he felt, a continuance of the ridicule he had provoked that morning, and he resented Broom's pertinacious buffoonery.

Broom was watching Roy with considerable curiosity, for the occasion suggested to him the possibility of a celebration. But the Englishman's manner was disappointing. In common with most of his countrymen, he thought it a weakness to give unlimited sway to his finer emotions, and generally covered them with an appearance of coldness and reserve. He did

so in this instance, and Broom's hopes fell to zero. But the expected happened, for when Roy and Hopkins started for the house, the former suggested that George should "take a drink."

The suggestion was received by George with unconcealed satisfaction, and Broom, who was following them closely, smiled in silent approbation of a proposal which was so entirely in accord with his own mind.

"It's going to be a dirty day," remarked Roy, glancing at the threatening clouds which hovered on the horizon.

"Yes, it's going to blow from the north-west," prophesied the dog-driver. "We've just got here in time."

"Yes, you're lucky. It will drift like the very dickens with all this loose snow about," supplemented the trader, who now paused to look around; then, "But come," he added, "let's get indoors."

With steps few and rapid the men soon reached the house. As they entered the door Sahanderry was observed standing with a steaming kettle in his hand. He spoke hurriedly to Hopkins, who hesitated a moment, then detained the trader with a respectful touch on the arm, and requested permission to postpone the whiskey-drinking till he had partaken of a few cups of tea.

"Tea!" ejaculated the surprised trader.

Broom was vastly amazed; that any man in the possession of his senses should prefer this homely

beverage to the more exhilarating spirit was entirely beyond his comprehension.

"Yes," observed George in respectful tones of apology, "I haven't drunk tea for eight days."

Roy's face cleared. "Of course," he said, "you've been without wood to boil the kettle. Where did you get the last cup of tea?"

"At Cape Eskimo," replied the other, mentioning a point some two hundred miles south of Fort Future.

"And you haven't tasted tea since; poor devil!" Roy now exhorted Sahanderry to at once supply the packet man with what he desired.

But the Indian had a comprehensive knowledge of "tripping," and had already brewed a kettle of tea. He now offered Hopkins a large mugful.

"Why, that's capital, Sahanderry," cried Roy, and he bade George seat himself and eat and drink to his heart's content. "You've earned it," he declared. "You can come to me later for the whiskey."

With the "packet" under his arm Roy entered his *sanctum sanctorum,* closely followed by Broom, whose face displayed the resentment he was feeling at what he considered Hopkins' idiosyncrasy in preferring tea to whiskey. He considered Hopkins had thrown away a glorious opportunity, and expressed his irritation in sullen looks and dissatisfied demeanor. "Of all the lunatics," he murmured to himself, glaring back at the unconscious cause of his anger.

The trader opened the "packet" without any unseemly haste, for he felt the other's eyes upon him. There were a goodly number of letters and news-

papers. These he commenced to sort, but, feeling that Broom was watching his every movement, he suddenly stopped, caught up a handful of newspapers at random and handed them to his too watchful companion.

Broom took the newspapers awkwardly and murmured something, presumably his thanks.

Again Roy turned to his correspondence. He hummed an Eskimo Crane song as he separated the letters from the papers.

"Oo-ee-yah, Oo-ee-yah-ah; Moo-nick-koo-li, Shak-pa ah;
Moo-nick-loon-eė, Nip-yaik-tal-ee,
Cle-uk! Cle-uk! Cle-uk!"
("Oh husband, oh husband, come dance with me;
Dance fast, and sing aloud,
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!")

which song, the natives solemnly aver, is sung by those birds on all occasions of festivity, the birds sitting round in a ring with one bird, presumably the leader, standing in the centre.

Roy hummed it over several times before completing his task. A small, square package of cardboard containing a photograph seemed to cause him much hesitation, and he paused to lay it beside the letters, then again to take it up and lay it on the newspapers, but eventually he gave it a place of honor by itself, apart from the rest of the mail.

By the time the last letter was sorted the heap had

grown to a respectable size. This fact Roy comprehended with manifest satisfaction.

The letters were addressed to him in several different hands, but the greater number were in the handwriting of one person—evidently that of a lady. After these letters had been separated from the others he arranged them according to a mystic sign, or number, which was visible in the left hand corner of each envelope, then suddenly, without any apparent cause, he dropped them on the table to snatch up the cardboard package. Cutting the string that bound it together, he discovered a photograph of a young girl, or rather, young woman, for it was the picture of a person about twenty years of age.

The photograph was of the size known as a "cabinet." The lady's costume, what could be perceived of it, was shadowy and indistinct. The features were those of a young, healthy-looking maiden neither beautiful nor even pretty, but the expression of the girl's face was pleasant, and the eyes which looked fearlessly out from it were large and good. The figure as far as could be judged from the photograph was short, and, to use a vulgar expression which aptly describes it, stocky.

Roy held the photo tenderly, gazing rapturously at the face pictured there. Presently he withdrew his eyes and glanced cautiously across at his companion.

Broom's face was hidden by the newspaper, in the reading of which he was apparently absorbed. Taking advantage of the other's abstraction, Roy hastily pressed the photograph to his lips.

A crisp, crackling sound peculiar to paper brought

a blush to Roy's cheek, and with guilty haste he laid the cardboard on the table, then he looked up with what nonchalance he could muster. His companion's attention was still absorbed in his reading, and Roy concluded with a feeling of relief that his late proceedings had passed unobserved. For although the act of kissing a photograph was in no way a grave offence, yet it was not an act he cared to commit before witnesses.

But Roy was wrong in his conjectures. By a skilful manipulation of the newspaper, Broom had seen Roy's every act, and now sat behind the paper with a supercilious smile upon his face.

Opening the first letter, Roy scanned it eagerly. "Well, my dear boy," it ran, "you will be pleased to hear that Papa has at last received his commission as Inspecting Chief Factor. The letter that he received from the directors in London acquainting him with the appointment was eulogistic in the extreme. The following extracts will give you some idea of the nice things they said:

> "It is a satisfaction to know that you are still in the sphere of activity. . . . We all feel that in you we shall have an Inspecting Chief Factor who will exercise his influence to instil new life into the Company which needs just now a master mind to resuscitate—to some extent, at least—its ancient prestige . . . That you will set yourself to work to inaugurate changes which are much needed . . ."

"There, now, what do you think of that? And dare you aspire to the daughter of such a man? But I have kept my greatest bit of news until the last. Papa is so elated with his new commission, and determined to inaugurate the changes spoken of in the letter, that he has decided to make a long trip of inspection during the coming summer, and, prepare to be astonished, 'Fort Future' is to be visited. Think of that, my boy, and tremble."

Roy read this letter through twice before laying it down to take up another, which was written in a different key.

"A terrible calamity has happened here. Young Mr. College got into a quarrel with a native and shot him dead. Papa declares that he was quite justified, as it was in self-defence, but I think it was horrible. I shall never look on the young fellow without a shudder. It would be impossible for me to take his hand; in my imagination it is covered with blood. *For in my opinion it is murder for a man to take another man's life, no matter what the circumstances that seem to extenuate it.*"

For perhaps five minutes Roy pondered over this letter and when he laid it down it was with a very solemn face. The words stirred him strangely, and he sat absent-mindedly fingering the next letter for some moments before cutting the envelope, but when he did so and his eye caught the opening lines, he started erect in his seat and a slight exclamation of surprise escaped him. Broom glanced at him in-

quiringly, but Roy was absorbed in his occupation and quite oblivious of Broom's presence.

"My dear boy," the letter ran, "you must not be frightened when I tell you that I have been ill. Not seriously ill, dear, but what we Canadians call 'under the weather,' and papa, after eager solicitations from myself, has promised to allow me to accompany him on his visit to Fort Future. Is not that most beautiful? I am sure I shall never get another good night's sleep till the time comes for us to start. It is three years since we saw each other. I wonder if I shall find you changed in appearance? If you will think that I have grown old-looking or ugly? . . . You may rest assured that, if I am alive and well, at the earliest possible chance after open navigation you will have the life plagued out of you by

Your ever loving

LENA."

This being the last letter necessary to the construction of our romance, we will leave Roy Thursby to his letters while I digress in my story to say something about the writer of the billet doux.

The first few years of Roy Thursby's employment in the Hudson's Bay Company's service were spent in the Mackenzie River District. The officer in charge of the Fort at which Roy was stationed was Factor James McLeod, a widower with one child, Lena—Roy's fair correspondent. After a short time spent in the constant society of the Factor's daughter the

young clerk became enamored of her and she in return favored his aspirations. Perceiving the upright character of the young fellow and the zeal he displayed in the Company's service—which augured well for his future success—Mr. McLeod consented to their being engaged, but stipulated that Roy should be in the possession of his Chief Trader's commission before they entertained any thoughts of marriage. Then Roy had been transferred to York Factory, and from there to Fort Future, as we have seen.

CHAPTER VIII.

DELGEZIE'S DESPAIR.

Roy Thursby laid down the last of his correspondence with mixed feelings of pleasure and strange forebodings. The delight he was feeling, since learning that Lena McLeod was to accompany her father on his trip of inspection, was tempered in a large measure by the words contained in the letter announcing young College's fatal encounter with the Indian—"For in my opinion it is murder for a man to take another man's life no matter what the circumstances that seem to extenuate it." This was a strange decree from one so young, and the words rang in Roy's brain, try how he might to forget them. Yet why they should so disturb and influence him he could not for the life of him imagine.

Mechanically he caught up a newspaper and ran his eye over its pages till dinner was pronounced ready.

During the meal Broom's manner appeared sullen and taciturn, and after a few minutes of desultory talk Roy lapsed into silence. But when they rose from the table the trader appeared to suddenly guess the cause of the other's moodiness, for after gaily exhorting Hopkins to come forward, he brought forth the "comfort," and at this Broom's face immediately

cleared, while Hopkins entered the room blithely and took the stiff dram offered him.

The arrival of the "packet" was now celebrated by Broom with more fervor, and entirely unsolicited he refilled his glass and drank success to "George Hopkins."

Roy noted the circumstance with displeasure, but suppressed his inclination to draw Broom's attention to it, and drank the toast with as much grace as he could assume. Then, unceremoniously, he whipped the bottle off the table.

No whit abashed, the loquacious Broom told a number of pithy stories, which he related in his inimitable manner. These and other merry quips kept Hopkins in a constant fit of laughter, in which Roy, despite his annoyance, was at length forced to join.

Suddenly a gust of wind struck the house, shaking it to its foundations. The trader and the dog-driver glanced simultaneously at the window, then at each other with an accompanying nod, as if to say that their prognostications of a blow were proving correct.

At once Roy thought of Kasba, for he had been told that she had gone for meat. Had she returned? Had anyone seen her pass the house? Where was her father, Delgezie?

Receiving no answer to his questions from Broom or Hopkins, neither of whom knew the whereabouts of the girl or her father, Roy called in Sahanderry and again put the questions. The Indian entered with a face that clearly betrayed the anxiety he was feeling, but he could give no satisfactory information.

He was almost certain Kasba had not returned, but as it was possible that she might have passed while they were at dinner he was unable to speak positively. He then spoke of his own doubts and fears regarding the girl's safety.

But the trader checked these voluble premonitions by commanding Sahanderry to go to Delgezie's hut and find out the truth of the matter, while he struggled into his "hairy coat."

Without waiting for further directions the Indian rushed from the room. Fears for Kasba's safety animated his movements. But he was stopped short in his impetuous haste before he had crossed the kitchen, the door being suddenly thrown open by Delgezie himself, who hastily entered, pulling the door to after him.

Delgezie's entrance was the signal for the greatly perturbed Sahanderry to begin a string of confusing questions interlarded with much advice and dire prophecies of evil, but Roy came to the rescue of the distracted old man by peremptorily ordering the young Indian to hold his tongue, and then by a few direct questions the trader elicited the fact that the girl and boy left the Fort at seven o'clock that morning and had not yet returned.

"Seven o'clock! They had left at seven o'clock! Then they should have been back long ago! It is now two! What can have happened to them?" The trader spoke sharply and with evident anxiety.

In a bewildered fashion the old Indian stood gazing at the speaker, leaning a little forward as if to

better read the expression on Roy's face. He had the most implicit faith in the trader's superior judgment, and with the simplicity of a child waited to be told what he was to do. His features worked in a nervous, agitated manner and a pipe that he had been unconsciously holding fell from his hand to the floor. Suddenly he seemed to be aware of Roy's perturbed manner, and made for the door, but at once Roy called after him, demanding what he was about to do.

But the old man made no answer. He was fumbling at the door, which he presently opened and went hastily out.

Those left in the room looked askance at one another.

"Follow him, Sahanderry," cried Roy; "bring him back; he cannot go like that. Be quick, man."

Sahanderry hastened to the door, but a sharp cry without caused him to pause with his hand on the latch. The cry was followed by the howling of dogs; a peculiar long-drawn howl which the listener instantly recognized as proceeding from dogs that had become entangled or whose progress was in some measure impeded. The trio in the inner room again looked at one another, but this time it was with a smile of relief.

"That's them," asserted Sahanderry from the kitchen, "the dogs have found their way home and the sled has got stuck against something." With this information he hurried outside.

But when he opened the door and stepped out, Sahanderry could see nothing; everything was ob-

scured by the drifting snow. The wind rushed round the buildings from all points at once and seemed to gather additional impetus at every corner. The Indian paused, half blinded by the cutting wind and nipped by the intense cold. But the dogs, as if to baffle discovery and thereby prolong his apprehensions, became suddenly quiet. Taking a step forward he called to them in a loud voice. Just then a bulky object loomed suddenly out of the gloom and he came in violent contact with something which, although sufficiently substantial to cause him a shock and nearly send him off his feet, was at the same time curiously soft. Sahanderry recoiled from it with a thrill of apprehension and the thing, whatever it was, instantly passed into the house.

The dazed and vastly astonished Indian remained for a moment staring after the object. Then an idea of what it was struck him and he swiftly followed it. When he entered the house he found Roy Thursby bending over something which lay stretched upon a table, over which a blanket had been thrown. Delgezie was standing apart, nervous yet confident in his master's power to restore animation to the apparently lifeless body he had just given into his charge.

After bending over the object for a moment longer, Roy looked up with a slight exclamation and a quick glance at Delgezie.

The old man's quiet demeanor led Roy to suppose that he was laboring under the delusion that the body was that of Kasba. The mistake was very possible, for the object was enveloped in a "hairy coat,"

and was covered with snow when Delgezie discovered it. He had evidently caught it from the sled without closely inspecting it and rushed into the house with the senseless David in the belief that it was Kasba he was carrying. Roy was debating how best to acquaint Delgezie with the error when the matter was taken entirely out of his hands by Sahanderry, who had drawn nigh and was now hurling a volley of questions at the unconscious boy.

Delgezie started as if electrified when the import of Sahanderry's importunate questions dawned upon him. He glanced suspiciously around as if to perceive whether by any possibility the body could have been changed, then rushed to the table, where he gazed long and searchingly at David, whose existence he had evidently forgotten in his great despair for Kasba. Then wildly he turned, and, holding up his hands, cried in accents of direst agony: "She is my all, O God! Take not the tender branch and leave the old trunk standing!" Then, dropping his hands, he added as if to himself, "But I will find her or never return alive!"

Uttering these words, he was again about to rush from the room when Roy caught his arm and so prevented him. With the fury of a wild animal the old man turned on his captor; then, perceiving whom he was struggling with, he instantly desisted. The trader, however, held him for a moment longer in order to allow time for his habit of discipline to assert itself, then commanded him, with a harshness he was far from feeling, to seat himself and so re-

main until he was told to move. The poor old man seated himself mechanically with bowed head and dazed, resigned manner pitiful to witness. The sight of the Indian's profound despair went to the heart of the trader, who had a singular affection for the aged; but the moment was too pregnant of danger both to the boy on the table and the girl out in the drifting snow to allow him to engage in sentiment.

Meanwhile Broom with commendable dexterity had removed all of David's clothing.

"Snow! Bring snow!" he cried.

Sahanderry and the little dog-driver, who had been present during these proceedings, quickly fetched the required snow.

The unfortunate boy's hands and face were literally frozen. His eyes were closed, and his lips pressed tightly together.

Broom and Hopkins now gave the boy a vigorous rubbing with snow to restore the circulation, which had been arrested by the intense cold. This was no soft, agreeable massage, but a lustily performed rubbing that almost took the skin off.

After a time these exhausting efforts had the desired effect. David sighed and opened his eyes.

Whereupon the garrulous Sahanderry again bombarded him with questions, but a peremptory: "Be quiet and fetch me some hot water," from the trader, sent him post-haste to the kitchen.

Hastily diluting some brandy, Roy, after a little difficulty, got it down the boy's throat and almost immediately he seemed much revived. The light

expression returned to his eyes, and he tried to articulate, and the trader began to hope that he might have an explanation before he left on his search for the missing girl; and while the boy had been undergoing his severe course of friction Roy had been by no means idle, as two neatly rolled bundles enveloped in blankets testified. He had tied up what necessaries he judged likely to prove useful to the distressed Kasba, making them into two bundles, each ready to sling across a man's shoulder. He intended to carry one himself and give the other to Delgezie to carry; thereby guarding against any possibility of either of them coming upon the girl without the recuperating necessaries; for in their hazardous hunt for the missing girl the two men might become separated. Then, bending over the prostrate boy, Roy earnestly adjured him to tell where he had last seen Kasba.

David's attempts to articulate were pitiful to behold; the name of the girl he loved as a sister stimulated him to heroic efforts to speak, but he could only moan in reply, while large tears ran down his burning cheeks.

Roy soon perceived that he would be unable to get an explanation from the boy in the usual way, and resolved to acquire the desired information by the intricate means of signs.

Again he bent over David and this time he spoke in Chipewyan.

"Now, David," he said, speaking slowly, "I see that you are unable to talk, but you can hear me speak

and by doing what I desire, you will make yourself understood just as well. If you wish to answer 'yes' close both your eyes, if 'no' keep them open. You understand me, don't you?"

The boy's bright eyes shut instantly.

"That's right!" said Roy. "Now, was Kasba walking 'before' the dogs when you last saw her?"

Those bright eyes shut again.

"Good! You were coming to the Fort and were somewhere near the 'little hill'?"

The boy's eyes closed quickly.

"You were on this side of the 'hill'?"

David stared at him.

"You were on the other side?"

David shut his eyes in the affirmative.

For a moment Roy hesitated, then, as if deciding he could not get any further information, he turned to go. But as he did so he saw such a look of profound despair pass over David's face that he turned to him again. The mute appeal in the boy's eyes gripped at his heart.

"You want me to search in some particular place for Kasba?" he said.

The eyes shut instantly.

"At the 'saw pit'?" David stared at him.

"Sandy Ridge?" There was no response.

Roy mentioned all the likely localities by name, but those haunting eyes only watched him feverishly.

Tenderly he patted the boy's head. "You have done your best, David," Roy said, "but it is impossible for me to understand where you mean and I

must go and look for the girl without further delay." With this he turned away. But David, after lying perfectly still as if to collect all his failing energies for one mighty effort, partly raised himself and called out something in a hoarse shriek, but with such vehemence as to cause the first part to be quite unintelligible.

The sound of David's voice brought Roy round on his heel with a swing. His quick ear had caught the word "gully." The boy was lying on the table breathing fast and hard, his keen black eyes watching the trader with an eagerness that told that he was anxiously waiting to be further questioned.

"Gully! gully!" said Roy to himself; "What does he mean?" Then, in a flash it came to him. About a mile from the "little hill" was a gully, Peter's gully.

Again he essayed an explanation from David.

There was now a glad, happy look on the boy's face as if by some means he had discovered that Roy was in possession of the name he had tried so very hard to utter. Probably Roy's look of relief, or, what is more likely, the movement of his lips, as he repeated the words to himself, had given the boy his cue.

The question was scarcely put before it was answered by those black eyes, which closed several times in as many flashes. Then, as if the excited boy's unnaturally pent-up feelings had suddenly broken bonds he gave a horrible, ghastly laugh that sent an unpleasant thrill through all within hearing.

Delgezie, who had remained perfectly impassive

while Roy was interrogating David, jumped excitedly to his feet at the sound of this unnatural laughter.

"What's that?" he demanded, gazing around him in a scared, bewildered fashion.

Roy touched the old man's arm softly. "Come, Delgezie," he said, cheerfully. "We will now go and find Kasba; David thinks she might be sheltering in Peter's Gully. I think we can find that even in this drift, eh, old man?"

The old Chipewyan started suddenly at hearing his daughter's name. He gazed at Roy for a moment in doubt, then, perceiving a smile on his face, he smiled pathetically in return.

"I think so," he replied, and at once started for the door.

"Wait! Catch hold of this," cried Roy, pitching one of the bundles to him, then slipping the other over his own shoulder. "We must go equipped or we may as well stay at home."

The distracted father was now all impatience to be off. But Roy paused to give Broom a few instructions for the proper disposal of David. Then, carrying a small compass in his hand, he walked outside, closely followed by the old Indian.

Closing the door, Roy paused to take his bearings by the compass, then started after Delgezie, who was already some yards in front. He did not seek to overtake the old man, but followed close behind, keeping him in sight except, occasionally, when a snow-cloud enveloped him for a few moments. The

force of the wind was terrific. It swept over the plain howling like a pack of wolves, and drove the men before it at a great pace.

After scudding along at this unusual speed for some time the air became literally filled with snowflakes and the darkness thickened. It was with utmost difficulty that Roy was able to consult the compass. But feeling assured that he was going in the right direction he allowed the wind to blow him forward.

Suddenly the darkness lifted and Roy gazed about him in search of Delgezie, but nowhere could he be seen. A ridge of rocks loomed out of the gloom and caused Roy to consult the compass anew. "You're a bit of a liar, my friend," he murmured, slipping the offending instrument into his mitten in token of his disgust, for he knew by the character of the rocks that he had come directly south and not southwest as he had intended—the compass had proved incorrect, as compasses frequently do in the Far North.

"Well," thought Roy, "I may as well have a look now that I am here," and with this determination he steered his way to a small ravine which he knew ran through the rocks before him.

And there he lustily shouted the girl's name, but there was no response, and after a time he turned and left the ravine in an attempt to reach Peter's Gully, his original destination. However, he had not walked far into the open before he stumbled and fell, and picking himself up he found that he had

tripped over a pair of snowshoes. These he eagerly scrutinized. From their size he perceived that they belonged to Kasba, and with a terrific yell that fairly outrivalled the howling of the wind he recommenced his search for their owner.

After searching for some time, Roy discovered an object huddled in a hollow of the rocks and sprang forward with a low cry of eagerness, but in his impetuosity he tripped and fell heavily. The noise and ejaculation occasioned by the fall apparently awoke the object into life. For a little cloud of snow arose as a covering was suddenly thrown back and the girl's face appeared. Roy struggled to his feet with a laugh, but it was with a sobered air that he approached Kasba.

"Are you all right, Kasba?" he inquired, anxiously peering down at her.

The girl nodded; she was too cold to articulate, and unable to rise from the same cause.

Perceiving this, Roy caught her up in his arms to transport her to another part of the ravine where, as he knew, there was plenty of dry wood for a fire.

Thus Kasba was brought into the closest possible contact with the man she loved, and, despite her resolution to think of him no more, she nestled in Roy's strong embrace with a little sigh of complete contentment; she felt that the severe hardships she had undergone in the blizzard were proving blessings in disguise now that they had given her these moments of rapturous happiness. Her little

brown hand stole to his shoulder caressingly and she pressed closer to him.

He could feel the beautiful form of the young girl pressing against his breast. She was such a child, and was so little and dainty, that the temptation to respond to her caress was not to be withstood, and lowering his head a little he kissed her on the full lips.

The instant he did it he felt a pang of conscience for his act. It seemed like a sacrilege after just receiving letters from Lena.

But he had done it more thoughtlessly than otherwise, besides he was overjoyed at finding the girl safe and well. She had had a miraculous escape. Still, he realized he had done wrong.

Kasba sighed rapturously. He could feel her heart throbbing, and for a moment she clung to him passionately.

At this display of passion, he more than ever doubted the wisdom of his act. He had not intended playing the lover to this half-savage child. He felt he had played the villain. He knew she had more than ordinary intelligence and that if he went on in that way he would break her heart.

He disengaged himself kindly and stood her upon her feet, but she still clung to his arm, hugging it to her bosom. Her face was flushed and joyous: he had kissed her, and all eternity could not take from her the memory of that moment.

As for Roy, in my opinion, he was certainly skating over very thin ice.

CHAPTER IX.

ENTERTAINING THE "PACKET" MEN.

During the next few days the sufferers from exposure and travel quickly recuperated, and in a week all were once again in their accustomed good health. Kasba had luckily escaped Jack Frost's most tenacious embrace, and a few hours had been sufficient to enable her to throw off the lethargy occasioned by her perilous adventure. David, on the other hand, had suffered painfully. The parts of his body that had been frozen became swollen and inflamed to an alarming degree, but as the blood regained its accustomed circulation the swelling slowly subsided. After two days of careful nursing the boy had been removed to Delgezie's hut, where he had quickly recovered the use of his limbs and elasticity of spirits, while any fatigue the little dog-driver and his partner might have felt by their long journey had been entirely shaken off after several good nights' rest.

Roy had traded with the few Eskimo encamped at the Fort and sent them about their business. A large seamless sack, whose sides bulged alarmingly, standing behind the counter in the trading store, had been the cynosure of their oblique eyes. This was the damning evidence of Ocpic's cupidity, the sack

he had filled with goods during the time he was in possession of Roy's store key, but had been prevented from transporting from the premises for some unaccountable reason—probably some sound had alarmed him and caused him to leave the store post-haste.

The Eskimo spoke among themselves respecting the incident, and from the fragmentary conversation Roy overheard whilst engaging in trading with them he gathered that they felt more regret at Ocpic's failing to take the goods away than at his behavior. And this was not to be wondered at, for they were acquainted with Roy only as a man who gave "nothing for nothing," while Ocpic was of their own race, and truly blood is thicker than water.

The trading-store was a small, unpretentious building of undressed plank. It contained every imaginable commodity likely to be required for the Eskimo trade: cloth of red and blue, white capotes, blankets, scalpy knives, dags (snow-knives), pocket-knives, white seed beads, telescopes, tin and copper kettles of various sizes and a large stock of firearms, etc. First of all an Eskimo handed his bale of furs over the counter to Roy, who counted and valued them. Having done this, the trader handed the native a number of pins (pieces of wood), which the native with great deliberation arranged upon the counter, first in tens, then into little piles according to how much he wanted to buy of any one article. Each of these pieces of wood represented a "skin," or, as it is sometimes called, a "made beaver," the standard valuation by which trade is carried on

between the Hudson's Bay Company and the natives in that northern country. Having selected an article valued at, say, eight skins, the native handed over eight of his pieces of wood in exchange, and continued this method of doing business till all were gone.

As each native finished his bartering he fell out of the gang which thronged before the counter, and retired to the particular iglo he inhabited to gloat over his purchases. After untying the bundle which he had tied up in the store with such security as to lead one to imagine that he never again intended to unloose it, he took each purchase in hand separately, felt the edges of the knives, admired their workmanship and shape, closely scrutinized the large tin kettles and went into raptures over their shining brightness.

The trading done and the Eskimo away from the Fort, Roy gave his attention to the accounts and letters he wished to send by the return "packet." The packet-train's stay at Fort Future was limited to one week by the hard-and-fast rules governing the Company's "packets," and Roy's search for Kasba and his trading with the natives had occupied several days of this time, but at an isolated post like Fort Future the official correspondence was not heavy and he was easily able to accomplish that part of his duties in due season. The work of writing his private letters, however, was more protracted. It was only in the evenings, after the loquacious Broom had retired, that Roy could apply himself to these. But by continuing his labors into the small hours of the

morning he arose from the table on the last day of the allotted time with his work completed.

With the "packet" off his mind, Roy turned his thoughts to giving Hopkins and his companion a good send-off, and accordingly he arranged for a dance to take place that evening. Sahanderry was told to make a large supply of raisin cakes and to coax his dilapidated fiddle into tune. And the delighted Indian proceeded to carry out these orders with much jubilation. Soon little squares of dough, spotted with raisins, lay on top of the stove, and the pleasant smell of newly-cooked cakes filled the house all morning. During the afternoon the Indian brought out his fiddle and started to tune it. At this Broom uttered fearful imprecations and threatened to throw various objects at the fiddler's head, but Roy, greatly amused, allowed Sahanderry to go on with his tuning, and the Indian continued the nerve-racking process with diabolical ingenuity.

As soon as supper was over, Sahanderry and Hopkins prepared the kitchen for the coming ball, and when everything was in readiness and the guests assembled Roy was apprised of the fact. There was a short delay occasioned by Broom, who at the last moment decided to groom his hair and unkempt whiskers, then the trader and his companion put in an appearance.

Kasba's face at once filled with delight. She had not forgotten the caress she had received from Bekothrie; her lips where his had pressed them tingled still. And when he stood up for the first

dance with her, thereby elating her into a seventh heaven of happiness, the crimson flew to her cheeks and brow. She tossed her head and smiled very prettily, her heart glowing in her eyes, and I must confess she clung to his hand, as they went through the figure dances, a good deal longer than was necessary; also, I may as well tell you at once, she put up her lips, when she bade him good-night, standing on tiptoe that she might reach his face. He received her salute with a little laugh of embarrassment, and in truth was too much worried over what she had done to allow of his sleeping after he turned in.

Kasba was the only woman present at this singular entertainment, but the absence of lady partners seemed in no wise to detract from the jollity of the evening. Hopkins, Poo-koo and David faced Broom, Delgezie and Minnihak, while Roy had Kasba for partner, as we have just described, and jigs, country dances, figures of eight, duck dances and rabbit dances were one and all performed with commendable spirit. There was a little confusion in the set dances caused by an occasional mix-up of partners or a dancer jigging alone down the perspective, but these mistakes only added to the fun of the evening.

At first solemnity and much perspiration marked these performances, but as pint after pint of "sugar beer" was swallowed by the thirsty dancers, their solemnity wore away, a gayer humor prevailed and some most intricate steps were ventured upon and accomplished with more or less success by the juvenile members of the party.

As the evening progressed, Broom suddenly burst into a song, much to Roy's astonishment, for the sailor had often declared himself incapable of singing a note. The comic expression of Broom's face created much amusement, and when he ended his performance by shuffling a few steps after the orthodox manner of the music-hall artists the delight of his audience knew no bounds, and the fun waxed fast and furious till the clock pointed to the hour of midnight. At the striking of the hour, Roy shook hands with all present, and then, led by Broom, three cheers were given for "the master," and the party quickly dissolved.

Despite their terpsichorean efforts of the previous evening they were all up betimes next morning. Even Broom arose much before his wonted hour to see the packet men start on their return journey.

"Well, good luck, George!" cried Roy, grasping the little dog-driver by the hand. "May you have a good trip!"

"Thank you, sir," returned the little man, who hastily proceeded to shake hands with all within sight, which act of courtesy was closely imitated by Poo-koo. And while it was yet dark the packet-train started on its hazardous journey south. The dogs, greatly refreshed by their rest, bounded after the rapidly disappearing Eskimo in front, who, unlike most of his race, was a good and fast walker, and the last link to the outside world was quickly swallowed up in the gloom of the early morning.

With an unconscious sigh of regret Roy turned to

go indoors. To be sure Churchill was as much out of the world as Fort Future, but there were more people—possibly a dozen—and four mails a year there. Four mails a year looked good to Roy. Truly all things are judged by comparison.

Roy's naturally buoyant spirits seemed to have departed with the packet and he appeared dull and listless, remaining preoccupied during the whole of breakfast, and returning only monosyllabic answers to Broom's airy remarks. The interesting occupation of letter-writing gone, there seemed nothing to occupy his mind, and it was with something of an effort that he forced himself to take up the old monotonous life and to revive the interest he had hitherto felt in his work. But these feelings, this hankering after the unattainable, was soon dispersed by his strong will, and he was again the zealous officer the Company had ever found him. He was inwardly longing for the time when the ice would be out of the river, and Chief Factor McCall would arrive on his trip of inspection, and the knowledge that Lena was to accompany her father only made the enforced wait the more exasperating. But Roy knew from bitter experience that the only way to make time fly was to be fully occupied, and he therefore decided to make a trip to the camp of his Eskimo trader Acpa.

CHAPTER X.

A TRIP TO AN ESKIMO ENCAMPMENT.

Roy and Broom spent the evening following in desultory conversation. The latter was feeling in one of his best moods, but a strange presentiment of coming evil beset the trader; that peculiar instinctive feeling of some approaching calamity with which we are all more or less acquainted; the shadowy, indistinct sensation that some catastrophe is nigh and about to overwhelm us.

As Roy's naturally buoyant spirits were not prone to fits of depression he felt irritated with himself and attempted to throw it off, but the feeling was so persistent, so singularly distinct, that it caused him to hesitate about making the journey. It was only by a supreme effort that he suppressed these premonitions of evil and bent his mind on the business before him.

He had arranged for Minnihak to accompany him as guide, and Delgezie to follow with a second train of dogs. Consequently the charge of the Fort fell to Sahanderry, who was summoned to the inner room to receive his orders. Roy made a point of giving these instructions in the presence of Broom, so that he might perfectly understand his position and that

he remained at the Fort merely as a guest, and that except for the preparing of his meals the Chipewyan was in no wise under his direction or supervision. After establishing this fact beyond any possibility of doubt, Roy dismissed Sahanderry.

"And now we'll take a last horn together," he said, little thinking how prophetic his words would prove.

"Thanks, old man," returned the sailor. Then, as if the thought had suddenly flashed upon him, he added: "By the way, you might leave a drop with me, old chap; the time will be deuced long while you're away."

Roy shot him a quick glance and remained silent for some moments as if debating within himself. He turned and lingered over the spirit chest, and then, alas, against his better judgment, he produced two bottles of whiskey which he handed to the sailor. There was nothing in these innocent black bottles to warn him that they would be chiefly instrumental in bringing about the catastrophe his gloomy forebodings had foreshadowed—*the imp of evil was there.*

"I shall be away only four days if the weather holds good," said Roy. Then looking the other straight in the eyes he added a little more seriously, but with a smile: "Of course I depend upon you behaving yourself, Broom. You've given your word that you will try no more foolishness with Kasba, and I trust you. I have given you the liquor you asked for, but I don't expect you to make an ass of yourself."

Broom smiled broadly while engaged in stowing the bottles under a pillow of his bunk.

"Dear me, what a doubting Thomas you are!" he said. Then, with the theatrical manner he was so fond of assuming, he added: "You may proceed on your hazardous journey, my good Samaritan, with the greatest confidence in your humble servant's future exemplary behavior. He will conduct himself in the most approved manner during your absence."

After this virtuous assurance, Broom partly filled an enamelled mug with whiskey from a bottle on the table, and, raising it in the air, drank to "a successful trip." "May you return with your sleds loaded down with furs," he cried, in a more friendly spirit than he had shown for some time past.

Thanking him for his wishes, Roy drank the liquor he had mixed for himself, and prepared for bed.

"You must excuse me," he said, "for I am making an early start in the morning. But don't let my going to bed interfere with your enjoyment. There is not much in the bottle, you might as well finish it."

Broom muttered something about the other's generosity and drew the bottle toward him, while Roy made haste to bed.

The trading party left the Fort long before daylight next morning and were many miles away when the "day-sky" crept over the horizon, for the dogs were going well. Neither of the *com-it-uks* was loaded very heavily, although they appeared to be so

from their bulk, but this was caused by the amount of bedding, changes of clothing, and other useful gear that trippers in the Far North are compelled to take with them when making a trip, it does not matter how short, in winter; for a blizzard, like that in which Kasba was lost, easily protracts a short trip into one of several days' duration.

The day passed all too quickly for the little party, who, keenly alive to the changeableness of the weather at that time of the year, endeavored to push on with the greatest speed possible. With this end in view, only one short stop was made "to boil the kettle," as the phrase goes. Beyond this there was no stopping, and each of the men was aware of sundry severe promptings from an empty stomach long before the approaching dusk compelled them to camp for the night.

At a word from Roy the guide selected a suitable spot, and the dogs were brought to a halt in a little bluff of trees. The place chosen was not an ideal one, for the brush was poor and dry wood scarce, but, as the men well knew, there was no better for some miles, and they lost no time in idle speculation or useless regrets. Silently, and with the skilful precision and dexterity of men well accustomed to the work, they went about their several duties, each to his own task, knowing what was expected of him. To Delgezie fell the task of "making camp." Having picked a spot free from underwood and where there were no holes, he slipped off his snowshoes and using one as a spade proceeded to clear the

ground of snow, while Roy, acting as the old man's assistant, cut and brought suitable spruce trees which Delgezie "branched" as soon as he had cleared a space some ten feet square, strewing the small branches thickly over the uncovered ground, and at the same time making a three-sided barricade some four feet high out of the robbed trunks. The back of the camp was toward the wind, while the front, or open side of the square, was reserved for the fire.

The camp built, Roy stopped cutting "brush" and joined Minnihak in procuring "dry wood," which Delgezie cut into lengths as soon as brought.

Then the trader and the Chipewyan turned their attention to the dogs, which were unharnessed, tied to adjacent trees and bedded down with brush. A terrific clamoring ensued, for long experience told the dogs that these acts betokened the feeding hour. Four pounds of venison were now thrown to each of them, as a reward for the faithful efforts of the day, and on a tree near by a bag containing a night's feed for men and dogs was cached for the return journey. Thus the *com-it-uks* were lightened by many pounds' weight the first day out.

By this time Minnihak had a fire blazing fiercely and throwing its glare all about them, making the camp appear a comfortable haven indeed, as compared to the cold, bleak surroundings, and Roy and Delgezie stepped into its warm radius and knocked the snow from their moccasins and trousers with their thick deerskin mittens, smiling the pleased smile of weary men satisfied.

The duties of cook fell upon the guide, Minnihak, according to the rules of tripping. But although the Eskimo had acquired the elements of civilization he was sadly remiss in the nicer details of cleanliness, which made his services in that capacity quite undesirable. Therefore Delgezie cooked the food, while Minnihak carried out the more menial labors of cook's mate, in pursuance of which he had already gone to a near-by river and brought back several large blocks of ice for the kettle, and these lay ready to the cook's hand, glistening in the firelight.

Supper over, the men gave themselves up to a few minutes' smoke and reverie—the most delightful time of the tripper's day—and their thoughts naturally turned to sleep. Delgezie, who always held prayer before retiring, began a hymn, which he sang alone, for Roy was unable to follow the old man's peculiar intonation, and Minnihak was ignorant of both language and tune.

In a reverie Roy's gaze wandered from the bright glow of the fire, through the few sparce spruce trees and out to the cold, desolate region beyond. The moon was shining brightly, illuminating the surrounding solitude which stretched into the far distance on either side like a terrestrial eternity, having no visible beginning or end.

With a shudder of awe at the weird grandeur, profound silence, and magnitude of the scene, Roy realized himself an insignificant atom in God's great plan of creation, and his eyes, following the bent of his thoughts, instinctively sought the heavens, where

they discovered a magnificent lunar halo, a white corona with a pale-hued edge completely encircling the moon.

Withdrawing his gaze from this beautiful phenomenon as Delgezie fell on his knees to pray, Roy whipped off his cap and stood with head reverently bowed while the old man stumbled through the General Confession. At the words "*Nota Yaka Thenda Nese*" (Our Father, etc.), Roy repeated the prayer with such fervor as to cause the Eskimo to look up in astonishment.

None but those who have witnessed it can understand the singularly striking effect of such a scene—the small, rudely constructed camp with the fire throwing its glare afar; the profound silence; the vast surrounding solitudes and the little group of devotees, apparently alone in an immense wilderness, their faces lit by the lurid glow of the fire; the gentle soughing of the wind; the celestial canopy bright with myriads of twinkling stars—all this appeals to the imagination and, despite an inclination to ridicule, a distinctly religious feeling prevails, while thoughts prone to wander on excursions of levity are brought sharply to order and turned inward.

Delgezie was the last to retire. Before lying down the old Indian made all secure from fire by pushing the burning embers out in the snow. Then, after making certain that the trader was well covered, he raised himself to take a last look about him.

A light wind from the west seemed somewhat capricious and threatened to change to another point of the compass. This caused Delgezie some uneasiness; he feared it might change during the night, which meant a change of camp. And changing camp in the dark, on a bitter-cold night, is a most disagreeable experience.

CHAPTER XI.

BROOM HAS CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES AND A SORE TEMPTATION.

"I see the right, and I approve it, too;
Condemn the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue."
—*Tate.*

Left to his own devices, Broom sat at his lonely breakfast on the morning of Roy's departure, racking his brains for a means of diverting himself. The big loneliness of the place had been penetrating his soul for some time, and now that he was deprived of Roy's society there was nothing to relieve the death-like monotony of the life. To find something sufficiently interesting to make the time pass quickly seemed to him a necessity, for the man's mentality was as weak in this respect as that of a boy or a frisky animal. But a new divertisement was difficult to devise. Sleep? He was tired of sleeping. It seemed to him that he did nothing else. Books? He was satiated with reading. The gun? He was no shot, and the weather was intensely cold. Conversation? Nothing would delight him more, but there was no one but Sahanderry and Kasba to speak to. Sahanderry was unfriendly, and Kasba—the forbidden fruit. The whiskey? Ha! This indeed offered great possibilities, it tempted him almost

beyond his powers of resistance, but his promise to Roy, though given in a facetious manner, was as binding to him as anything could well be, and drink, as an entertainment, was excluded thereby. Traps? Should he attend his traps? It was a clear morning, with no wind; cold? yes, but he could guard against that. Yes, he would visit his traps. It would please Roy, he knew, therefore he would go.

It was with feelings of righteous self-abnegation—an odd sensation and entirely new to this hardened sinner—that he proceeded to his traps.

In his magnanimity he went so far as to invite Sahanderry to take a drink with him before starting, but the Indian, hugging his animosity closely, refused. Broom's unprecedented cordiality, however, was not entirely wasted. It had a mollifying effect upon the Indian, for he fixed the netting of the sailor's snowshoes with greater care than he would otherwise have done, and even departed from his customary morose manner toward him to wish him "good luck" when he started on his quest.

Broom went on his way strangely thoughtful. There was a new-found joy in the thought that he had denied himself the drink. He was even conscious of feeling virtuous—a sensation quite foreign to him of late—and under the influence of this new experience life seemed to take on a new aspect. He was not given to conscientious scruples, and the sensation was not altogether pleasant, for, stripped of his habitual indifference, he stood revealed in a new guise, and found the picture not good to look upon.

Everything around him was of unsullied whiteness; the very stillness and profound solitude cried loudly to him of the Creator. He felt out of harmony with his surroundings, knew that he was the one black spot in a region clothed with a mantle of purity, and, like the progenitor of the human race, he was ashamed.

Rime fell lightly in prismatic crystals, scintillating and glistening in the bright sunshine all about him, and in the heavens there was a magnificent spectacle, a beautiful celestial phenomenon: the sun shining through the falling rime took the shape of a fiery cross, and on each side of this sublime luminary, at some little distance, shone a luminous ball, and, attached to each of these, on the side farthest from the sun, and rising perpendicularly, was a little rainbow which extended in glowing bands of deep red, orange, and light blue.

Stretching out from these were bars of silver reaching across the heavens on each side like gigantic arms and ending in indistinct vaporous clouds like huge hands which appeared about to clutch the earth in their embrace. Higher in the heavens, and exactly above the sun, a crescent, its colors corresponding with the beautiful sections of the rainbow, shone out brightly, and at different points around the horizon indistinct rainbow hues were visible.

Broom was by now well accustomed to the many splendid phenomena of the Far North, but the present magnificent spectacle—catching him at a time when he stood disarmed, when for the moment his

mantle of indifference and cynicism had fallen from him—influenced him strangely. However, a mind perturbed with religious feelings was unusual to Broom, and like the now fast-disappearing phenomenon, this unusual experience was soon gone. With the arrogance natural to mankind he stifled this slight inclination, this prompting toward reform, and lapsed into the hardened, cynical reprobate he naturally was, at least to outward seeming. Alas! what a number of Mr. Brooms there are in the world!

Fate, luck, or Providence, call it which you will, reciprocated Broom's magnanimous feelings by smiling on him. His hunting-bag by the time he had visited all his traps was swollen to undue proportions and bore significant signs of lood luck. He was greatly elated at this success. Scorning his customary long, slouching stride as a mode of locomotion too slow to keep pace with his excited feelings, he covered the ground at a quick trot and arrived at the Fort in a thoroughly exhausted condition.

"Phew! That's warm work," he cried as he entered the door and found Sahanderry standing before him with the vestige of a smile on his dark face.

"How many?" inquired Sahanderry shortly.

"Five, my boy!" Broom dropped the bag of foxes to the floor with a long sigh of relief. His face was scarlet. He was "blowing like a grampus," and now that he was in the house he perspired freely. "Guess I've earned a drink," he said, and passing into the inner room, quickly produced the bottle and mug.

After taking a goodly modicum of whiskey he eyed the bottle dubiously. The liquor had shrunk in an incredible manner: a few more such potations and he would arrive at the bottom of the bottle. To guard against the calamity of running out of liquor altogether the tippler made a mental reservation to drink only one-third of his stock of whiskey on each of the following days, thereby securing an allowance for each day of Roy's absence.

In theory the scheme was undoubtedly good, and well worthy of the versatile sailor, but in practice it did not turn out as well as he expected. For when he tumbled out of bed on the third morning, with an exceedingly hazy idea of how he ever got into it, he discovered to his chagrin that the whiskey was almost all gone. Evidently nothing but an overpowering fit of slumber had prevented him from drinking the whole.

Sitting on the edge of the bunk, feeling dull and miserable, he was conscious of a raging, overpowering thirst, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he laid restraining hands on himself and drank only enough of the already greatly depleted liquor to discover, as he told himself, if what remained was the real stuff. But this potation not only proved its genuineness, but also greatly revived him, or, in his own expressive language, "it made him feel a bit more perky."

After putting the bottle aside with the scrupulous carefulness of a miser secreting gold, he sank into a chair and sat in drowsy contemplation for a few

minutes. Then, casting a disconsolate eye around him, his gaze encountered Roy's liquor chest with its neat fastenings and lock. Immediately a fancied procession of the black bottles danced before his burning eyes. The thought that most likely a considerable quantity of whiskey lay in the snug-looking box and within easy reach brought him upright in his chair with a jerk and he sat gazing at it as if fascinated. Then, withdrawing his eyes with an effort, he sprang suddenly to his feet and, catching up his coat and hat, rushed from the room, clutching his snowshoes as he ran.

Once outside and away from the dangerous fascinations of the locked chest Broom paused and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He stood irresolute for a moment, then, with an air of grim determination, turned in the direction of his traps, plodding onwards with leaden footsteps, weary and breakfastless.

Like one in a dream he stumbled on his way. A burning fire seemed to be consuming his vitals; flashes of heat and cold passed over him; his hands became moist, and he felt utterly fatigued. He was walking mechanically now and his nether limbs seemed to move like pendulums, forcing him to continue the function of walking, to drag his weary body along without any effort of will or possibility of staying their movements.

On his return he could discover no sign of Sahanderry's presence and for this he was devoutly thankful; for he felt too jaded, too dejected, to encounter

the gaze of his watchful enemy. On nearing the Fort he had endeavored to recover his old careless "bon-aire" expression, but he was conscious that the effort had been a miserable failure, and, therefore, the Indian's absence proved both a relief and a boon.

Throwing aside his outdoor apparel he sank into a chair where he sat profusely perspiring like a man prostrated by weakness. He braced himself in his seat to resist the temptation that he knew would come. Sinking back, he gripped the sides of his chair with the tenacity of one in a delirium and forced his gaze into a far corner of the room.

Finding it impossible to keep his eyes fixed on any one spot, he cast about him for something to occupy his mind. He could not go outside, for the weather was too intensely cold to allow anyone to sit down, and he felt too ill and weary to walk about any more. His breakfast stood upon the table, where it had been placed by Sahanderry many hours before, but it remained untasted, for he could not eat. He had no desire for food, but the appetite for strong liquor was almost mastering him. He knew the feeling and dreaded it. In his desperation he reached for a book that protruded from under the pillow in his bunk, then again sinking back in his chair, he endeavored to read. But the print danced before his eyes, the large capital letters grouped themselves together and stood leering at him. Suddenly in place of the dancing printed type he saw a smooth wooden box, the lid fastened with a strong lock; for unconsciously the book had dropped from

his hands and he was again staring at Roy's spirit chest. After this he seemed to lose all consciousness of things around him, his whole attention was riveted on the object of his gaze. Presently he stiffened himself as to resist some powerful shock; probably the last spark of manhood was making vigorous struggles to extricate him from so pitiful a position. Beads of perspiration stood on his brow, and he fell to trembling like a man with the palsy. To his heated imagination the lid of the box slid slightly back and a long thin hand protruded itself and was beckoning him on. Then, as the hand still beckoned, several black bottles slipped out also and began a grotesque dance upon the lid, while others thrust forth their heads to laugh, grimly, and make horrible grimaces at him. Suddenly Broom started to his feet. He passed a trembling hand across his eyes and then, with a sigh of abject helplessness, staggered forward to fall on his knees before the fascinating chest which he now eagerly scanned. With a cry more animal than human, he began to take off its hinges with his pocket knife, for apart from the strong lock, Roy had attempted no precautions to make the box secure.

A slight snapping of the fire caused Broom to stop in his frenzied labors and to glare around the room like a hunted animal. But, apparently satisfied that no one was there, he returned to his task, working at the hinges with the cunning of a man bordering on delirium tremens. In a few moments the screws were out and the lid thrown back from the rear, the

hasp and staple acting as a hinge. Then with a snarl of disappointment the wretched man sprang to his feet, for with the exception of one bottle the box was empty. In his heated imagination he had pictured it filled to the top with rows of shining bottles and now he stood for a moment glaring around him like a wild beast defrauded of its prey, and well was it for Sahanderry that he did not appear upon the scene at that moment. Then uttering a little chuckle Broom dropped on his knees and clutched ravenously at the one bottle, which he fondled and caressed with a foolish cooing noise horrible to hear; while the hands of the bewildered wretch were now shaking so as to threaten destruction to the bottle's contents. With the cunning of a madman Broom perceived this, and rising to his feet, and mastering his agitation with a strong effort, he began to draw the cork with the aid of two pocket-knives. "Experience makes perfect," and Broom had become dexterous in the art of cork drawing. So this cork was soon extracted and the neck of the bottle hastily glued to his trembling lips. He took several long pulls before placing it upon the table, then, in a dazed and mechanical way, he replaced the hinges upon the box by returning the screws to their places. He now stood slowly swaying from side to side, his face wearing a curious expression like one slowly returning to consciousness. Grasping the bottle with both hands, he took another deep draught, then fell upon his bed panting and exhausted, as if from some supreme exertion. After a few minutes of restlessness he fell asleep.

When Sahanderry peeped into the room a little later, he found Broom sleeping tranquilly. The Indian glanced from the sailor to the bottle on the table, and believing it to be one of those given him by Roy, smiled contemptuously, while his idea of the sailor's drinking capabilities underwent a quick change.

Next morning Sahanderry was vastly surprised to find the sailor in the same position. He was sleeping heavily, as his deep breathing and nasal accompaniment testified, and his prolonged slumber aroused the Indian's suspicion. Stepping lightly across to the chest he carefully scrutinized the lock, but found no evidence of its having been tampered with. What then had produced Broom's long sleep? Sahanderry lifted the bottle from the table and held it up to the light. It was still a quarter full. This was astounding. Despite the Indian's obtuseness he was sharp enough to perceive that Broom must have procured other liquor. But from where? And how? Sahanderry shrugged his shoulders, and spreading out his hands in a deprecating gesture he washed them of the whole business.

It was late in the day when Broom awoke from his long season of unconsciousness, for slumber it could hardly be called. Rising from his elbow, he gazed about him. His head ached excruciatingly. His brain seemed on fire. His tongue felt tough and dry so that he found it hard to articulate. With a moan he fell back upon the pillow to collect his scattered senses and as he slowly awoke to the full consciousness of what he had done, a sentiment of bitterness rose in his mind against himself.

Presently he dropped over the side of the bunk and reached for the bottle with an unsteady hand. As he put it to his trembling lips a little of the liquor trickled down his chin, and a sudden revulsion of feeling came over him. Pushing the bottle away with a look of malignant hate he paced the floor with short unsteady steps, and with his long hair and whiskers matted and disheveled, his face swollen and flushed, his eyes intensely blood-shot and whole frame trembling violently, he was indeed a pitiable sight.

Presently the distracted man took his resolution. He caught up his coat and struggled into it, but when it came to securing the buttons his unsteady hands fumbled and refused their office. With an exclamation of impatience he again reached for the bottle, and this time he drained it to the dregs. Then, pulling on his cap savagely, he rushed from the house.

But his perambulations were soon cut short and he discovered himself stuck in the deep snow, for he had left his snow-shoes behind. However, he did not return for them; instead he took a circuitous path made hard by constant usage and leading toward the open, quite unaware that Kasba, ardently persuaded by David, who wished to shoot some birds, had also taken this easy route and was coming towards him.

The boy and girl had gone but a short distance when a flock of partridges rose with a whir-r-r and flew to the rocks above them, and David with boyish enthusiasm scrambled up the heights after the birds, saying he would rejoin the girl farther down the track.

Walking slowly with drooping head, Kasba went thoughtfullly along the path before her. She knew every foot of the ground over which she went. Suddenly she became aware of the close presence of another, and starting she raised her frightened eyes. Before her, leaning against a boulder, was Broom. He stood with his back toward her, and his face buried in his hands. He was apparently feeling ill and dazed.

The girl shrank back as if she had been struck, then for some moments she stood immovable, her startled gaze fixed upon the bowed figure. Instinctively she felt her danger. A stifled gasp escaped her and tremors shook her frame from head to foot. Yet she dare not turn back, for David would be waiting. She must go on, or he would come to look for her and discover Broom. She shuddered to think what might happen then, for the impetuous boy violently disliked the fellow and would not miss an opportunity of annoying him. Besides Broom had been drinking heavily. Sahanderry had communicated his suspicions to her and from what she could make out there seemed to be a great degree of truth in them. Therefore she must not leave David. Broom would be in a black humor after his drinking bout. She shuddered again. But this was no time for weakness. She would go on, she *must.* Firmly bracing her nerves, Kasba stepped lightly forward.

With bated breath she moved, step by step, toward the silent figure. Very slowly and stealthily she approached him.

The man continued to stand perfectly still, but as she drew nearer his motionless figure, she could scarcely restrain herself from crying aloud, so acute was her terror.

With a last effort, a strong, determined effort, she was beside him. The snow under her feet crunched to her imagination like the report of a gun. Her heart stood still, she felt discovery inevitable. With a mighty effort she strangled the cry in her throat.

The boulder against which Broom leaned was close beside the track, and the attitude he had assumed caused him to occupy most of it. To pass him so closely was to court certain discovery. Kasba resolved to make a slight detour, but she had not brought her snowshoes. She had left the house with the intention of taking only a short walk along the beaten track and had thought them unnecessary. Off the track the snow was deep and soft. What should she do?

On her left was a ridge of rocks presenting acclivities of every degree; on her right was a strip of scrub almost covered by loose snow. The track, beaten hard by Sahanderry on constant journeyings to his traps, led straight before her, and, blocking this narrow path was the inert figure of Broom. But between the track and the rocks was a narrow strip that to all seeming was perfectly hard. This she carefully tried with one foot. It bore her weight and with steady, cautious steps she passed on for a short time in safety. Then, with a peculiar, dull report, the crust gave way and the girl sank to her knees in soft snow.

Broom started nervously. Raising his head apprehensively he at once discovered Kasba and her unfortunate position.

With Broom's eye upon her the distracted girl ceased her ineffectual struggles and stood staring at him wildly like one fascinated.

At first he believed her to be one of the multitudinous delusions of a deranged mind. But presently he was convinced that it was no delirious fantasy, but really Kasba's self who was there, alone and in his power, and he laughed the loud mirthless laugh of one gone mad.

The girl quailed before his gaze of malicious triumph, then turned and made frantic efforts to release herself from the clogging snow and to regain the hard track.

"Not so fast," cried Broom, rushing in and grasping her by the waist. "Not so fast, my little white partridge."

In vain Kasba struggled while Broom rained hot kisses on her mouth. She could not prevent him. She was in his power indeed.

But just when she had given up in despair Broom suddenly uttered a terrific yell and loosened his grip. The girl stood bewildered. She was dimly conscious that her captor had released her and was now scuffling with something small and dark, and mechanically she drew herself out of his reach. Then, floundering desperately out of the soft snow to the beaten track, she fled along with a speed born of panic-stricken horror; never pausing, never looking back, but rushing straight on and on—to her father's hut.

Broom, swearing like a madman, looked about him. A dark form had dropped seemingly from the sky, to spring forward upon his right arm, where it clung with the tenacious grip of a bulldog. He was taken completely by surprise. In his nervously-excited condition the suddenness of the attack had startled him. He imagined himself assailed by some uncanny foe or some fierce wolf, and he had released the girl the better to defend himself, and Kasba was beyond all possibility of recapture before he discovered, to his chagrin, that his adversary was no ferocious animal, but the boy David, who had discovered Kasba's precarious position and slid down the face of the almost perpendicular rocks to launch himself upon her assailant. In an ungovernable paroxysm of baffled fury he now rained blows upon the boy's unprotected face. David clung to his wrists for some moments longer, then sank on the snow with a moan of pain, and lay there limp and lifeless.

Broom gazed stupidly at the still form for a moment, then with a cry like that of a hunted animal he rushed from the scene.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ESKIMO ENCAMPMENT.

Contrary to Delgezie's fears the wind played no pranks with them that night, but after coquetting around all points of the compass, suddenly died out altogether.

Still it was with a grunt of disgust that he threw back his blankets next morning, for a heavy rime was falling and everything appeared white and cold to his gaze. Glancing up at that celestial clock—the North Guards—and finding its tail pointing well toward the south, he arose and set about building a fire. But the kindlings were coated with rime and he experienced much difficulty in persuading them to ignite. However after much patient coaxing the mass was at last got into a blaze, and, unceremoniously awakening his assistant with a dexterous kick, he proceeded to prepare breakfast. Thus rudely awakened Minnihak reluctantly drew himself from his warm robes—he had no objection to the intense cold, but a decided antipathy to early rising.

Hearing the men astir, Roy arose also and shook his bedding clear of the cloying rime before packing it away in his bag. To take a hasty breakfast, " ice " the *com-it-uks,* lash the loads, and harness the dogs was the work of fully an hour, for the morning was

intensely cold, and everything unpleasantly chilly and icy to the touch; falling on exposed parts of the warm person, the rime at once became damp, then froze, clogging the eyebrows and eyelashes, and any hair on the face, with icy particles. It was one of the coldest mornings of that winter, and the tenacious clinging of the rime accentuated its chill.

Roy and Delgezie completed their disagreeable task of harnessing the dogs as quickly as possible, then jumped into camp to warm their benumbed fingers, while Minnihak followed more leisurely, smiling and unperturbed.

"*Ik-ki-mai*" (It is very cold), he said laconically.

Roy in his haste to lash the sled had inadvertently touched the head of an axe with his naked hand, thereby "burning" his fingers, and he now stood nursing them with a rueful countenance, making, because of this, a brief pause at the fire. But soon a start was made, and by the time the sun had thrown its cheering rays over the desolate wilderness, the trippers were well on their journey.

Their course for some distance followed the river, then branched off sharply and ran along a little creek, at the mouth of which Minnihak was seen to stop, turn aside, and walk across to a partly built *iglo,* which, from its appearance, Roy judged to be the one in which Oulybuck had hanged his father and brother, and when his dogs got abreast of it, he stopped them and walked across to view this primitive gallows.

The walls of this *iglo* apparently remained as they

had been first built, but the gruesome paraphernalia was missing, the crossbar and line being probably buried with the defunct Eskimos, and the block of snow from whence they had launched themselves into eternity thrown aside and drifted over. Deep imprints on the snow walls told that death had come only to the suicides after desperate struggles, and two distinct mounds of snow a little to one side and close together clearly marked the suicides' graves. A fox had been digging at one of them, and the excavations had left the handle of a saw exposed to view; for the belongings of the deceased Eskimos had been buried with their bodies, after the custom of their race.

Shortly after leaving the ill-omened spot the travellers came in sight of Acpa's encampment. This consisted of several *iglos* grouped together with an unusually large one in the centre. The smaller *iglos* were of the ordinary kind, but the big one bore unmistakable signs of its owner's quality and importance. Not only was it larger than the others, but it had two protuberances instead of one: the one, as in the usual case, being the kitchen, as a wreath of blue smoke ascending from it testified; and as Acpa held the proud position of a trusted trader, the other without doubt was used by him as a storehouse, a room where the trader bartered with his brother Eskimos.

A number of dogs were running in and out of the *iglos*, and these at once gave the alarm; promptly several rough, shaggy figures dragged themselves through the tunnels leading to their various abodes

and stood watching the approaching dog trains. The moment the *com-it-uks* arrived at the encampment busy hands, with the characteristic readiness of the Eskimo to assist, caught at the dogs while others carried the bundles of merchandise away.

While the unharnessing and unloading were taking place still other Eskimos were engaged erecting a snow-house for Roy and the old Chipewyan, for the trader invariably despatched his Eskimo guide to sleep with a friend on these occasions.

Eskimo etiquette compelled the guest of honor to wait in Acpa's abode till his own was pronounced ready for occupation, and in compliance with this rule Roy dragged himself through the low entrance, followed by a number of old men, women and children.

He got to his feet in the kitchen and went forward, picking his way among the skulking dogs, which, like the Irishman's pig, were on terms of equality with their master, to the large room in the centre, and once there he gave a sigh of relief, for the air was less stifling, albeit the ventilation still left much to be desired.

Kaip-puks were brought by members of the family and spread on one of the elevated platforms or bedsteads for Roy to sit upon, and he seated himself with an inward hope that his claim on their hospitality might be of the shortest duration.

The bundles of merchandise he had brought for Acpa were now lying in the small room adjoining, which, as he conjectured, was used specially for such

purposes. The one in which he sat was large and dome-shaped, while several pieces of comparatively transparent ice had been let into the walls to afford the necessary light. The storehouse and kitchen were lit in like manner, but in the latter a few sticks of driftwood were smouldering on some flat stones, the smoke from these travelling to the roof in the most erratic manner, occasionally darkening the larger room in its wanderings.

A number of men and women soon sauntered in, and, squatting down at a little distance from Roy, sat silently watching him, while friendly smiles suffused their greasy faces; infants clothed only in a hood, or perchance a tobacco pipe, were produced with startling suddenness from the capacious hoods of the women's coats.

Grouped among the throng were old and feeble Eskimos with the wrinkled faces, projecting cheek-bones and lantern jaws peculiar to the very aged, and young wives with yellow complexions and bright, intelligent faces, their hair ornamented in a fashion peculiar to themselves, with a kind of pigtail formed from the hair over each ear neatly braided, the ends decorated with beads and deer-teeth, and bands of brass worn across the forehead. Sprinkled among the group were children of various ages, and probably of both sexes, though their costumes were so exactly alike that it was impossible to distinguish to which sex each belonged. Altogether this close scrutiny was oppressive, and when Acpa appeared some minutes later, Roy's face brightened perceptibly. "*Ay-hoo-*

ee-la?" (Finished?) he asked with the best attempt at indifference he could muster.

"*Ay-hoo*" (short for It is finished), replied the old man.

Roy slowly arose, intending to make a dignified exit, but even a fur-trader's powers of endurance have their limits, and he stumbled quickly across the kitchen and precipitated himself through the low exit into the fresh air, and, with feelings of grateful relief, filled his lungs with the crisp oxygen. His confinement in the smoky *iglo* had made him quite ill.

Entering the one erected for him by the hospitable Eskimos, Roy found Delgezie awaiting his return and supper prepared.

The old Indian was smiling. "They're giving a dance," he observed, glancing at the trader with eyes that twinkled.

"The deuce they are; and they'll expect me to attend, I suppose," grumbled Roy.

"Expect so," said Delgezie drily.

Further comment was stopped by the appearance of Acpa, who approached with a face which radiated cheerfulness and goodwill. He squatted down and partook of the food handed to him with apparent relish, for intercourse with the white man had given him a taste for bread, tea and sugar, and even coffee.

After finishing the meal he proffered his unwelcome invitation in this wise: "The Innuit are happy," pause. "They are glad to see you," pause and a smile. "Innuit will dance," another pause and smile, then ingratiatingly, "The 'master' will come?"

Here an expansive smile spread over his heavy features and broadened into a laugh.

Roy received the invitation with an assenting nod, and forced a smile to his lips. He inwardly shrank at the thought of having again to enter Acpa's odorous and smoky abode, yet he dissembled, for he knew that his presence at the dance was a thing of course.

Presently the soft tap-tap of a drum was heard, and Acpa got slowly to his feet, while Roy arose with assumed alacrity and followed his host to the scene of revelry.

Since the trader's last visit a number of young men had returned from the hunt, and these were now seated in a circle eating ravenously of frozen meat, raw and unsightly.

For this occasion the *iglo* was lit by candles of home manufacture, these being tapering pieces of dry moss and balls of grease. The bands of brass across the foreheads of the women shining brightly in the subdued light; the circle of hungry Eskimos devouring their food like as many ravenous animals; the shadowy, indistinct figures of the old folk seated on the outskirts of the throng, and the bright faces of the children watching the assembly with keen and earnest eyes, all combined to make the scene grotesquely weird. And the tap-tapping of the drum went steadily on.

When the circle of hunters had satisfied their rapacious appetites, it slowly dissolved. Then, snickering and joking, the women formed themselves into a circle and the ball was opened by Acpa, who

stepped into the centre of the ring, carrying a drum in his hand.

This peculiar instrument consisted of a piece of parchment stretched tightly across a wooden hoop with a straight handle attached. The parchment was dampened before each performance, a tuning process as novel as simple. Acpa struck the rim of the drum, the top and bottom alternately, against a stick, held in the left hand, while shuffling his feet in a semblance of step dancing, then striking the drum in the centre a few times, he threw back his grand old head and gazed up at the top of the *iglo*—seemingly for inspiration—then fell to shouting, the shouts diminishing in volume as they increased in rapidity. "*Oh-ee, oh-ee, oh-ee, oh-ee-ee, oh-ee-ee, oh-ee-ee!*" This was the cue for the women's chorus, and they now rocked themselves backwards and forwards, repeating in high-pitched voices: "*Ya-ya, ya-a-ya, ya-ya,*" while the old man composed his song as he went along. The sentiments were at times poetic. He first thanked the "master" for coming to see him and expressed a wish that he would be satisfied with his trip. Then he spoke of his work and the work of the other Eskimos of the encampment and many other things in the daily lives of himself and companions. Occasionally he lapsed into the monotonous *Ya-ya* of the chorus, or fell to shouting *Oh-ee, oh-ee,* but the drum beating was continuous.

Afterwards several other men followed in this unique individual dance and then came the turn of the perspiring chorus to disport themselves. But the

women's *rôle* was the exact opposite of that of the men, for they danced two at a time and at first were as silent as nuns, and they used no drum. Staring each other straight in the eyes they shuffled their feet, repeating queer words wheezily at the back of their throats, all accompanied by a peculiar indrawing of the breath. Many gestures accompanied this uncanny performance, such as pointing derisive fingers at each other, this meaning "I think very little of you," pointing upwards and downwards (the significance of which seemed in doubt) and lustily slapping their cheeks and patting their breasts. Evidently this was a dance of endurance, but at last the final pair fell panting and exhausted, and, taking advantage of this respite, Roy hastened to shake hands with all present and to leave the *iglo*.

The gleam of dawn spread in one golden glow of morning, and the day rose radiant over the world. The *com-it-uks* were "light" and the dogs travelled quickly, and the sun was still high when our little party got back to the camp they had made on the previous day, and, the wind being in the same direction as when the camp was constructed, it was ready for their use and their labors were thus lightened.

Supper over, Minnihak went to inspect a trap he had set when they were there before. Roy stretched himself on the outside of his bedding and lay dozing, while Delgezie occupied himself making "cakes" for the morrow. He had been employed in this manner for some time when he heard a slight crunching sound as of something moving over the snow. He thought

it was the Eskimo returning from his quest and did not lift his eyes. But as the moments went by and no Eskimo appeared, he raised himself slowly and looked around. A large wolf stood before him on the very edge of the camp.

It was watching Delgezie with a wicked snarl that left bare its ugly fangs. The hair along its backbone stood up stiffly and its eyes gleamed threateningly. It looked fiercely hungry and Delgezie expected it to spring at him, but it stood motionless and the old man's eyes searched the camp for a gun, but he could see no weapon, and then he remembered that the guns had been left outside. He uttered a grunt of indignation—that a lone wolf should invade his camp, seemingly as the aggressor, was, for the old Indian, a new experience. Keeping his eyes fixed on the wolf, Delgezie stealthily reached for a billet of wood. The animal watched him furtively; its long white fangs snapped and it crouched as if about to spring, but something in the old man's unperturbed pose and steady eye seemed to awe the beast and hold it aloof. Delgezie felt cautiously for the billet, a particular piece of green wood which as he knew lay beside the fire. He dared not withdraw his gaze, and could only grope blindly.

Suddenly he uttered a terrific yell and came upright with a bound. Feeling for the billet, he had missed that which he sought and grasped one that was burning. At the sudden and unexpected loud noise the wolf wheeled quickly and fled away.

Delgezie's yell brought Roy sharply to his feet.

"What in the world's the matter, man?" he demanded.

"Wolf in camp," replied Delgezie, nursing his injured fingers.

"Why didn't you waken me? I could have shot it," demanded Roy.

"Guns outside," said the old man drily.

Whipping a revolver from his hip-pocket, Roy said: "I keep this little thing for occasions like that." Then observing that Delgezie was in pain, he added, "But what have you done to your fingers?"

Delgezie explained, and his adventure caused much amusement during the rest of the evening.

On the following morning, Delgezie, with Minnihak as guide, left the track in order to get a load of meat from a cache some distance from the camp and off the direct route to the Fort, and sitting on the sled smoking idly while the dogs ran briskly to the sound of jingling bells, Roy returned to the Fort alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DASTARDLY DEED.

When Broom came to himself after rushing from the scene of his violence he discovered that he had returned instinctively to the Fort.

Finding the house in darkness he groped his way across the kitchen to the inner room, where, after a little, he succeeded in finding and lighting a lamp. As its rays fell upon his features they clearly disclosed the hateful effects of his debauch, the havoc his ungovernable paroxysms of violence and passion had worked upon him. The veins of his forehead were dark and swollen, his eyes inflamed and hollow, his look that of a worn-out demon. He was still agitated, and his blood-shot eyes swept the room fiercely like a wild beast still unsatisfied. His breathing was labored and his mood still that of half-suppressed fear and rage. Frowning and irresolute, he paused after lighting the lamp, then began to pace the floor unsteadily, his pace increasing in fretful rapidity as he continued his short, irregular perambulations. At last, as if wearying of this, he stopped short and leaned his weight against the pair of sleeping-bunks.

Just then the indistinct form of a man appeared noiselessly in the doorway.

Broom eyed it fearfully, while his face grew pale and moist with perspiration. He clutched at the sides of the bunks to support his trembling limbs. Then commanding his courage he demanded somewhat unsteadily:

"Who are you?—speak out—be you man or devil?"

The answer was a wordless mumble. The dim form slipped forward into the light and the broad figure and grinning face of Ocpic stood revealed, and Broom's courage was greatly restored. He heaved a long sigh of relief and made a ghastly attempt at jocularity.

"Well, you imp of Satan," he cried, "what do you want here?"

"*Ik-ki mai*" (It is very cold), declared the Eskimo with an accompanying expressive shiver. Then, entirely unsolicited, he lit the fire, which had gone out during Broom's absence.

Broom paid no further attention to the native. With short, jerky steps he recommenced his restless walk, pausing now and again with a nervous start as the wood in the stove cracked sharply, like so many reports of a pistol. He was in an impatient fury. His deliberations were far from pleasant, for he felt that however much Roy might be inclined to overlook the offence of breaking into the liquor chest, he had, by his unpardonable assault upon Kasba, followed by his brutal attack on David, put himself outside the pale of forgiveness. He knew by experience that the trader would show him no mercy for this second insult to the girl, and he dreaded his

return. Not that he was a coward—in the physical sense of the word; if corporal punishment could have atoned for his brutal conduct he would have taken his punishment—as he then felt—with the utmost satisfaction. But he recognized that in bringing this trouble upon himself he had betrayed the trader's trust, and this, to his mind, was a far greater offence than his more criminal actions—even as cheating at cards or the like ungentlemanly action is popularly supposed to touch a man's honor more closely than the committal of any offence in the criminal calendar. He paced the floor impatiently, out of humor with himself and things else, and cursing with bitter oaths his folly and the circumstances which led to it. Moreover, the craving for strong drink was again upon him, lashing him into a fury.

He had just succeeded in working himself into an ungovernable passion when the kitchen door was thrown violently open and Sahanderry burst into the room. The Indian gibbered wildly and seemed about to precipitate himself upon Broom.

"What for you do?" he cried excitedly, pausing in the doorway and spreading out his hands with a gesture of interrogation.

Broom stopped short in his walk and stared at the speaker with eyes that darted malignant hate. The appearance of Sahanderry was as a match to tinder, and Broom's look was so venomous that it disconcerted the Indian and he halted irresolutely.

Sahanderry's discomfiture tickled Broom. He laughed derisively, then abruptly resumed his tramp,

his manner signifying his utter contempt for anything the enraged Indian might do.

Incensed by the man's laughter, and drawing courage from his outraged feelings, Sahanderry approached his adversary with menacing gestures.

Broom halted, turned, and awaited his attack with a provoking smile.

Suddenly springing forward, the Indian seized him by the hair of his head with both hands, then paused to allow him to get a grip on his locks in turn—this being the tribal idea of the proper opening of affairs of honor, in which each man, having gotten a firm hold, tries to twist the neck of his antagonist by screwing his head into a position not in accordance with nature's planning. But Broom, after permitting his opponent to take up the proper attitude, suddenly discarded all further recognized rules of Chipewyan combat and struck the vastly astonished Sahanderry such a violent blow on the chest that had not the Indian's fingers been entangled in his adversary's hair, it would have felled him to the ground. As it was he was able to regain his equilibrium in part before relaxing his hold, and staggering against the table, he stood for a moment panting and muttering curses upon the head of the sailor, then slowly, craftily, he shifted his position.

For, in coming in contact with the table, he had instinctively put out his hands to break the force of the collision and had touched an object that stood thereon, over which his fingers had instantly closed, and without pausing to consider what the missile

might be or do, he, in great desperation and excitement, now hurled it with sudden strength, bred of his vindictive mood, at the head of the offending Broom.

The missile was the bottle stolen from the chest, and, hurled with all the force of Sahanderry's arm, it struck Broom full on the cheek with a cruel thud, then fell to the ground and broke.

This unexpected attack found Broom quite unprepared. He staggered from the force of the blow, but suddenly straightening himself, laughed discordantly and pulled a revolver, which he cocked and levelled at the now shrinking Indian, who, at the sight of the weapon, dropped to the ground and vanished under the table, where he lay trembling and terror-stricken.

The Indian's extreme fear filled Broom with fiendish glee. In sheer devilment he fired several times—apparently at haphazard, but with unerring aim, at various objects in the room. He was undoubtedly a dead shot, and, taking advantage of his skill, he tortured the poor distracted wretch until he moaned again. Fingering the revolver in an apparently careless fashion, he touched the trigger and the bullet passed in close proximity to Sahanderry's body. Then throwing up the weapon to feign sudden alarm it went off as if by accident, the bullet grazing the Indian's head. Then followed a display of fancy shooting, till, suddenly tiring of his amusement, Broom's mood changed. His face became grim again and once more he levelled the revolver at the shrink-

ing figure under the table. The Indian fairly shook with terror, and the sweat gathered upon his brow.

Sahanderry felt that his end had come. Broom's ghastly face and glistening eyes seemed proof that he was no longer accountable for his reckless acts.

"You can say your prayers, you hypocritical imp of Satan, for I'm going to kill you," hissed the madman. "In five minutes more you'll be a dead man."

And a dead man Sahanderry certainly would have been if Broom had been less elaborate in his system of torture. But during his shooting display Roy Thursby had arrived at the Fort, and hearing the report of the last shot had cautiously opened the door, crept noiselessly across the dark kitchen, and reached the room in time to hear Broom's murderous threat. As his eyes took in the scene presented he started and raised his clenched hand.

"Now, you hell-hound," continued Broom, "your time has come. I——" With a deadly intent he was sighting the weapon.

"Stop! You cowardly bully," cried Roy furiously from the doorway. "If you wish to fight you can fight me, but leave that wretched, cowering Indian alone." He spoke rapidly but calmly, and his tone of command had its effect upon Broom.

"What devil's luck brought him here?" Broom muttered to himself as he unconsciously lowered the revolver and stood looking at Roy with darkened brows. But the next moment he laughed recklessly.

Roy started at the sound of this discordant

laughter. He eyed Broom questioningly, apprehensively for some moments. From his strange agitated manner, the gray pallor of his countenance and the wild, shifty look in his eyes, Roy knew that he had to deal with a man who, if not actually insane, or acting a part, was on the verge of delirium, or could it be delirium tremens? But whatever the condition or cause, the man was in a state that might be dangerous to himself and to others, especially while in the possession of firearms. Roy resolved to propitiate him as far as was consistent with getting him under control.

"Fight you, my English bulldog; why, of course I'll fight you," cried the frenzied man, handling his revolver in a reckless manner. "But not in the low-bred manner of your countrymen, if you please. Hands are weapons for women; we'll fight like men." Again he flourished the dangerous weapon, then playfully presenting it at Roy, he shut an eye and took long, deliberate aim.

The trader glanced unflinchingly at the extended revolver. He fully realized that his life depended upon the whim of a lunatic, and God only knew what strange fantasy would next flash through Broom's crazed brain; but he realized also it was only a bold presence that would save the situation. He therefore desisted from drawing his own weapon, and remained motionless, gazing unswervingly down the little blue muzzle before him.

There was silence for some moments, then Broom laughed uncomfortably, and, throwing up the re-

volver, he deliberately fired over Roy's head. The bullet whistled desperately near his skull, but he stood immovable. This unperturbed demeanor appeared to have a quieting effect upon the delirious Broom, for he presently lowered his weapon.

Meanwhile a plan had flashed through Roy's brain. He would induce Broom to discharge his revolver at some innocent object till he was assured its chamber was exhausted; then, with the help of Sahanderry, he would secure him.

But unfortunately for this plan Broom's thoughts had returned to the proposed fight. Flourishing his own weapon recklessly, he called on Roy to "produce his gun!"

"Come on, my weak-blooded Englishman; surely you are not afraid," he jeered.

The offensive tone and leering face provoked Roy almost beyond endurance. But believing the man to be for the moment little better than a maniac, he controlled himself, and drawing a revolver, the one he had displayed to Delgezie in the camp, he deliberately opened the breech, ostensibly to discover whether it was in order, but really to gain time.

"Don't you think—," he was saying in conciliating tones, when the other broke in with a shout of demoniacal laughter; then suddenly remembering Sahanderry his brows clouded again and he muttered viciously, "but first I'll settle with this black trash," and once more he covered the cowering creature beneath the table, causing him to shrink still farther under cover.

The white fury of Broom's face and his deadly earnest manner startled Roy anew. He perceived that he must instantly distract the man's attention if he wished to save the Indian's life, and presenting his revolver at Broom, he called, in a tone of stern command:

"Drop your hand or I'll——." He spoke no further. By some unaccountable accident the weapon was discharged at the moment when Broom's finger was actually pressing the trigger of his revolver to shoot Sahanderry. Hearing the bullet whiz past his ears and believing that Roy had wilfully shot at him, he turned with lightning quickness, diverted his aim and fired, as he thought, in self-defence.

Roy staggered, swayed and fell heavily.

Standing rigidly erect, Broom gazed stupidly at the still body. His face was livid. His legs trembled under him. His arm dropped to his side, his hand still clenching the murderous weapon.

Picking himself from the corner, where he had hidden when the trader suddenly appeared, Ocpic now crept cautiously to the side of the prostrate man. He dropped on one knee and closely scrutinized the upturned face. Then laughing wildly, he got to his feet.

"*To-koo-kuni! To-koo-kuni!*" (He is dead, he is dead), he gleefully cried.

The sound of the Eskimo's voice brought Broom to himself. With a strong effort he withdrew his eyes from the senseless figure and gazed about the room like one suddenly awakened from an unpleasant

dream, in doubt whether the horrible event had really taken place, or he had been the victim of some grotesque nightmare. But all doubt as to its reality ceased when his wandering gaze returned to the outstretched body of his victim. This ghastly proof was sufficient to convince him that the crime was no fantasy of a delirious brain. He sighed heavily. A slight convulsion passed over his features. Then, terror taking the form of defiance, he sprang forward and stood gazing down at Roy's still figure.

A nervous grip was laid upon his shoulder and he swung fiercely round, his frightened gaze meeting the oblique eyes of the Eskimo, Ocpic, who stood pointing with extended arm; as Broom's eyes followed its direction his attention was drawn once more to Sahanderry, who by this time was almost dead of fright.

At the sight of the shrinking figure he started violently; the catastrophe had happened so suddenly and had so confused and stupefied him that all knowledge of Sahanderry's presence had been crowded from his mind. He now recalled it with fiendish satisfaction. Here was an object on which to vent his vicious rage, one who—as he wildly imagined—while under the secure protection of an all-powerful master had lost no opportunity to insult him covertly. But things were now changed; the exchange of shots had removed the protector, Sahanderry was masterless, and Broom resolved to take speedy and adequate vengeance. In his mood of ungovernable recklessness he hesitated no longer at the thought of

crime, but paused to form a plan of torture sufficiently atrocious, and the vicious books that were his only reading supplied him with plots innumerable.

Soon a plan suitable for his diabolical purpose occurred to him. Smiling sardonically he advanced to the table, and, stooping, caught the half dead Sahanderry by the heels, and drew him into the centre of the room, then, snatching a piece of clapmatch line from Ocpic's hand, he bound the distressed Indian in a secure fashion, the Indian making not the slightest struggle or even a murmur of dissent. The latter circumstance greatly amused Broom—a silent Sahanderry was a new experience. But his mood soon changed. He again eyed the poor, bound wretch with triumphant malignance, and, seating himself upon the edge of a bunk, he began his torture by elaborately unfolding his diabolical plot to the trembling prisoner.

Chuckling with fiendish glee he said:

"Now, Sahanderry, my friend, I am about to send you to your father, the devil, by means entirely original and devised by your humble servant. By the means I have in contemplation you will imitate the great and excellent prophet Elisha, insomuch as you will quit this world without encumbering the earth with your carcass."

Broom paused to enjoy the effect of his words. Sahanderry's face was livid. His eyes rolled in their sockets and threatened to start out of his head. His lips moved convulsively as if he were attempting to speak, but he was too panic-stricken to articulate.

Well satisfied, Broom continued: "I shall proceed to the trading-store and bring hither a keg of gunpowder. This explosive I shall place close beside you, so that you may get the full benefit of it. After extracting the little wooden stopper, or screw, which confines the dangerous powder to the inside of the keg, I shall place the end of a lighted candle in the hole, so that after burning a short time, in order to allow you to say your prayers, and me an opportunity to escape, the flame will come in contact with the powder, and—" Broom illustrated the probable result with expressive gestures.

Sahanderry groaned, at which Broom burst into a great fit of laughter. Then, finding the Indian was incapable of speech, Broom left the room. He was closely followed by Ocpic, who, anticipating some developments of a devilish nature, was singularly happy.

When Broom and his dusky coadjutor had gone, Sahanderry made superhuman exertions to free himself. But he had been too well bound by the sailor to escape, and by no possible effort could he loosen his bonds, though the line cut deeply into his wrists in his violent struggles.

"*Bekothrie, Bekothrie,*" he called hoarsely, in vain hope that he who had remained undaunted in so many encounters, who had survived so many dangers, would now rise up to his assistance. It was inconceivably strange to him that Roy should lie there so impassive, should have allowed these things to happen without remonstrance, for Sahanderry was

wholly unable to comprehend that Roy could be as readily overcome as any common mortal. But the lifeless form was still, and Sahanderry's heart sank within him and with apprehensions goaded to the utmost he waited his enemy's return.

Minutes of intense silence passed, then came the sound of deep breathing, and Ocpic staggered into the room, carrying a heavy keg. He was followed by Broom, whose white, set face and feverish eyes showed him still implacable.

Sahanderry moaned in utter despair. There was a curious grey pallor under his brickdust complexion. His heart was beating like a drum. He tried to speak, but his voice failed him.

Broom worked with grim expedition and the preliminaries were soon over.

Ocpic stood calmly watching events. His eyes took on a look of puzzled bewilderment as the work progressed, but when Broom struck a match to light the candle, Ocpic divined the hellish secret of these singular preparations. With a startled cry he made a bolt for the door.

But Broom caught him and unceremoniously threw him back. "*What-cha-o!*" (Wait!), he said grimly.

With a wary eye on the Eskimo, Broom struck another match and coolly lit the candle, but a draught caused the flame to burn unsteadily, and perceiving this was likely to precipitate the explosion Broom carefully snuffed out the flame with his finger and thumb.

"Won't do! Guess we'll have to shift it over there," he said, pointing to a corner of the room and glancing significantly at his companion; but Ocpic hesitated.

"Shift it, I tell you!" roared Broom.

Though unacquainted with the English language, Ocpic understood from Broom's gestures that he was ordered to move the keg of gunpowder. He tremblingly approached, and lifting it gingerly, placed it in the required place, then glanced furtively around for a speedy chance of escape. But Broom's bulk blocked the way. Perceiving Ocpic's lightning glance and divining its import, Broom waved him back.

"Stand back!" he snapped fiercely.

But the native retained his position boldly and scowled threateningly.

Sahanderry lay with palpitating heart, watching the two men, in the desperate hope that a conflict might ensue. Devotedly he prayed that they might come to blows, but after moments of agonizing suspense Ocpic's eyes dropped before the grim ferocity of Broom's look. He fell back reluctantly, scowling with rage, and muttering darkly to himself.

The candle was again lit, and this time the flame burned steadily. Broom was satisfied.

Standing aside, he allowed Ocpic to rush from the room, then quietly he walked to the door. Pausing at the doorway he called jeeringly back:

"Good-bye, friend Sahanderry, a quick and pleasant journey!" Then with a burst of sardonic laugh-

ter: "I shall now have the charming Kasba all to myself."

Left to himself Sahanderry lay still and lifeless, for the grim situation had scared him into a condition near to death. But presently the instinct of self-preservation awoke within him. Again he made terrific struggles to loosen his bonds. With frantic yells he strove to make himself heard, although he knew there was no likelihood of anyone being nearer than Delgezie's hut, and he realized that the sound of his voice would hardly carry beyond the walls around him. Yet in his extremity he found it impossible to keep silent. He persisted in his exertions to free himself, for the issue at stake was his life. His bonds cut deeply into his flesh at every movement and the pain was frightful, but he struggled till he could struggle no more and fell back exhausted, his head dropping to the floor with a dull thud.

As he lay there like a trussed fowl it seemed to him that never did candle burn so quickly. It shortened as if by magic. Soon the flame was flickering over the black powder. Suddenly Sahanderry lifted his head and listened with all his might. There was a sound outside. He gave a hoarse cry for help, then listened again, his heart thumping like a steam-engine. The sound drew nearer. It was a terrible moment. He glanced frantically at the fast expiring candle. Was there yet time? Spending all his remaining strength in one long-drawn-out cry, he fell back to listen. He heard footsteps. They came nearer, they paused, and then slowly went away.

It was Delgezie, who had just arrived. He was alone, Minnihak having left him to visit a trap. Finding no one on the look-out for him, Kasba not at hand to take his bedding, the old man became uneasy; his heart fluttered with vague forebodings. He took a few steps toward the house, paused undecidedly, then suddenly changing his mind, returned to his sled. Hauling off the dogs' harness with the ease and dexterity which come with custom, the old fellow tied it together mechanically. Then he again approached the house, muttering to himself in his uneasiness. Suddenly there was a blinding flash, a fearful report, then—darkness.

CHAPTER XIV.

GRUESOME DISCOVERIES.

It will be remembered that Kasba was left fleeing in panic terror to her father's hut; while the boy David, who had been wholly instrumental in effecting her escape, lay on the snow, beaten senseless by an infuriated ruffian's cowardly blows.

Now Kasba was not composed of the stuff that heroines are made of, and when she found herself free her natural impulse was to place as great a distance between herself and the scene of danger as she conveniently might. This she contrived to do with the best possible speed, but once safe in her father's hut and the door secured, her thoughts returned with a shock to David.

Where was he? Like a flash the remembrance of the dark object she had left battling with the enraged man occurred to her. It was, it must have been, David. He had sacrificed himself to Broom's fury that she might escape. Once thoroughly convinced of this, all fears for herself vanished, terror for the boy's safety crowded everything else from her mind. Emboldened by her love for him, she hastily unfastened the door and, stepping fearlessly forth, flew back over the narrow track. Realizing that every moment was precious, she returned with incredible speed to

the spot she had quitted in such haste. Heavens! What was that? The man she loathed and dreaded was gone, but on the snow lay David.

Regardless that the brutal ruffian might still be lurking in the close neighborhood, the girl, uttering a low cry, rushed to the senseless boy.

With tender solicitude she bent over him and raised his head upon her arm. His face was swollen, bruised, and stained with blood. His eyes were closed.

"Oh, David, David!" she sobbed piteously, "you have suffered for my sake."

But her first agony of feelings over, she was relieved to find that the boy was breathing regularly. Still the knowledge that he had received this cruel treatment in order to save her from insult brought a fresh flood of tears to her eyes.

Tenderly she bent over him, while from her heart a low, piteous appeal went up to heaven.

At length the boy's eyes unclosed, he gazed around in a dazed, bewildered fashion, then:

"What has happened? Where am I?" he asked wearily, and then: "Ah! I remember, the Ball-eye (white man)," he added with a quick start of apprehension.

"But he has gone now, dear," said Kasba. "He is a bad, wicked man and will be abundantly punished when Bekothrie returns. Come, dear, you must not stay here any longer. You will freeze. Let me help you up."

David staggered to his feet. Broom's dastardly

blows had been directed at his upturned face, so although giddy and faint he was still able to walk. The pair had not gone far before they heard a voice hailing them from the rear. Turning, they discovered Sahanderry striding toward them in vague alarm. When told of Broom's offences he was impatient to find and chastise him, but controlled his impetuosity till he had seen Kasba and the boy in safety.

Walking slowly with the assistance of Sahanderry and Kasba, for he would not hear of being carried, David was brought to the hut. Then, leaving Kasba to attend to the wounded boy, Sahanderry rushed in blind, impetuous haste to the Fort, his whole frame trembling with passion—and with what result we already know.

With infinite tenderness the girl washed and dressed David's bruised face. Then she assisted the boy to her own bed. He at first strongly objected to this, but Kasba was obdurate, and with a sigh of content he at last laid his aching head on the pillow.

Leaving him to fall asleep, the girl sank upon a seat in utter dejection. She remained seated a long time, fearing to move lest she wake the boy, who had quickly fallen asleep; then an explosion shook the little house to its foundations. Kasba started to her feet and stood petrified with fear. With a heart beating rapidly she waited and listened, but could detect no further sound.

A scared cry from the bed brought her to her senses. She flew to David, whom the noise had

rudely awakened, and throwing her arms protectingly around him she turned her scared face to the door.

The situation was nerve-trying. Except for their own audible breathing the darkness of the hut was as silent as the tomb. Clasped in each other's arms the two waited tremulously, expectantly, with fearful apprehensions, but of what they could not know, for only silence followed, silence becoming painful as it lengthened into minutes.

Choking down the hysterical sobs which threatened to overcome her, Kasba gently released herself from the boy's embrace. A pale gleam of light relieved the gloom from pitchy blackness. Moving cautiously about, she found the lamp and lit it. The light gave her additional courage. She went to the window and looked out. All was quiet. The view was bleak and cold, the dim light outside revealed the desolate waste but indistinctly; objects took phantom forms, appearing weird and out of all proportion. With a shudder of undefined dread, the girl turned away from the casement and went back to the boy.

David received her with a keenly expectant look. Kasba shook her head with a wan smile in answer to his mute inquiry.

"There's nothing, that I can see, dear," she declared with relief, sinking on the bed beside him.

"Was it an earthquake or an explosion?" he asked, in an awed whisper.

"An explosion, dear, and at the Fort, I'm afraid."

"More of that devil's work, I suppose," said the

boy after some considerable thought. Then quickly, "I wonder if Bekothrie was at home."

The girl sprang to her feet. The knowledge that her father and Roy were expected back that evening had entirely slipped from her mind. She stood rigidly erect, thinking desperately. What should she do? Perhaps the trader or her father had been injured by the explosion, perhaps both. She must go to the Fort to discover by their living presence that they were safe. Snatching her coat from where it hung, she drew it on without further delay or thought.

The boy watched her breathlessly, wide-eyed.

"I'm going to the Fort, dear," she said gently but firmly. "Like a good, brave boy you will stay here. I shall not be long away."

David caught his breath sharply, but smiled back manfully with a palpable effort to hide his fears.

Without pausing for further speech the girl stepped into the night, into the solitude and darkness, and with anxious heart passed swiftly along. Suddenly there broke forth upon the intense silence a loud, long-drawn howl. Kasba's blood ran cold. Again that dismal howl. From its great resemblance to a dog's she knew it for the voice of a wolf, and one suffering from hunger—its presence so near the Fort told her that—yet no thought of turning back beset her.

Awed and breathless she paused on the overhanging rocks at the back of the Fort, straining her eyes to distinguish between the conglomeration of build-

ings beneath her, which loomed up indistinctly; but there was just sufficient light from the stars to enable her to see that one of them was missing, that Roy's dwelling had tumbled down. The space it had occupied was lumbered with a disorderly pile of logs. "Good heavens!" came from the girl's lips—she was speaking distractedly.

So intent was she on trying to divine what had really happened that she shrieked aloud when something approached and touched her. It was Minnihak, Roy's Eskimo guide. Perceiving who it was, Kasba clutched him excitedly by the arm and eagerly questioned him as to her father and Roy's whereabouts. Failing to make him understand in Chipewyan she essayed in English, but only to meet with the like unsatisfactory result; the bewildered native shook his head, for he was conversant with neither language. The girl's feelings on first perceiving the Eskimo were of surprised relief, but her fears were instantly goaded to the utmost the moment she found she was unable to make herself understood. The suspense was appalling. Conjecturing evils of the very worst type, the girl was moved by an irresistible impulse to approach and search the ruins. Neglecting all precautions, regardless of all peril to herself, she flew down the uneven track, with an instinct that was truly marvellous avoiding the boulders and holes. A few moments and she was beside the mass of logs.

An awful accident must have happened to bring about the ruinous condition of the trader's dwelling.

"What should she do?" she again asked herself. "What could she do? Where was her father, where Roy?"

She waited and listened. All was still. The situation for a young, timid girl was extremely nerve-trying. A short time previously Kasba's natural disinclination to scenes of violence would probably have caused her to rush frantically away and precipitate herself in her father's hut to indulge in a fit of hysterical weeping, but now the uncertainty of her father's and Roy's fate chained her to the spot.

"Where were they? Perhaps beneath those logs!" The thought was horrible. When contemplating that huge pile all hope faded from her mind. The mere possibility of their being in the house when the explosion took place caused her heart to stand still, her blood to run cold. For it seemed an impossibility that they could have escaped being crushed to death beneath the falling logs, even if they had in some miraculous manner escaped injury by the explosion. Perhaps they now lay pinned to the earth, mangled and bleeding; and struggling with the convulsive sobs the mere thought called forth, she bent over the débris. Frantically she strove to push aside the heavy timbers that she might discover what lay beneath them, fearing at any moment that her eyes would meet some ghastly remains of one of the two men she loved. Yet with unflagging energy she worked on. In her frantic haste she was dimly conscious that the Eskimo had followed her, was lifting and throwing aside the ponderous logs with surpris-

ing energy; evidently he had caught her idea. But despite the native's prodigious efforts and her own desperate exertions the work proceeded at a snail's pace. Kasba quickly realized that her own puny strength availed her nothing, and a despairing moan at her own impotency escaped her. Her head was whirling round and round and she felt faint and giddy.

At that precise moment, as if heaven had pitied her helplessness and answered her prayer, a slight, muffled groan smote her ears.

Kasba uttered a cry of joy, for she recognized it as the sound of a human voice, knew that someone was alive beneath the ruins. Gathering strength from hopes renewed, the girl tore more frantically at the logs, straining every muscle to draw them aside.

Suddenly the voice was heard again. It was speaking.

Instantly Kasba paused in her panic haste to listen.

"*Kli-et-ee?*" (Who is there?), it said.

"It is I, Kasba!" cried the greatly excited girl. "Who speaks?"

"Sahanderry!" returned the voice.

With a cry of disappointment Kasba fell back. In her anxiety she had quite forgotten Sahanderry. She had imagined it to be her father who spoke, and her heart had leaped within her for joy. But now that she discovered it was not her father but another, the revulsion of feeling was too much for the already distracted girl. But the thought came to her that a

life was in deadly peril, that Sahanderry was entombed in that rude black pile and that immediate aid was necessary. Chiding herself for the delay and for her selfish regrets, she worked desperately to accomplish a rescue. The painfully disappointing incident, however, had sobered her. She now worked just as desperately, but with more system than before. By the aid of the Eskimo she quickly had a number of logs placed on one side. She then discovered that the house had not fallen completely, as she had at first believed, but that the walls farthest from the seat of the explosion, and a part of the roof attached, had not come wholly to the ground but were propped up by the other parts of the fallen building, forming a sheltering cavity, though threatening to fall with a crash at any minute. Beneath this dangerous but friendly shelter the groaning Sahanderry was discovered lying prone upon the ground. A timber pressed him to the earth and kept him from rising.

Groping in the dark, Kasba and Minnihak ultimately freed and carried Sahanderry from the ruins, but with heroic self-denial the girl refrained from questioning him till a large fire had been made by setting a light to some of the wreckage. The night was intensely cold and Sahanderry was chilled to the bone.

He crouched over the fire, his eyes wild and bewildered in expression, for he was not yet fully convinced of his miraculous escape. His burnt and

torn clothing, his scorched hair and eyebrows, testified to how narrow that escape really had been.

After waiting some minutes—interminable minutes they seemed to the girl—she could restrain herself no longer, but with a voice which quivered with suppressed but almost overpowering anxiety.

"*Se tah* (my father), *Bekothrie* (master)?" she queried desperately.

The injured man staggered to his feet with a hoarse cry of horrified remembrance. All thought of Broom's deadly shot and its consequences had completely slipped from his confused brain. Released from a position of extreme peril, saved from what he had considered an absolutely certain death, his mind had become blank to all else but his own unaccountable deliverance. The girl's questions brought back all the terrors of those horrible scenes. He wiped the sweat of remembrance from his brow with trembling hands. He shook like a leaf in a storm. Completely overcome, he lost all power of speech and stood rocking himself to and fro.

In the horror of conviction that either Roy or her father, perhaps both, had perished miserably, had been blown to pieces or scorched out of all semblance of a human creature, Kasba started impetuously forward. Clutching the distraught Sahanderry's hands she forcibly drew them from his face. "Where are they?" she demanded sharply.

Pointing with a shaking hand at the ruins, "Bekothrie is there," he cried hoarsely, then fell upon his face writhing and groaning.

Ignoring Sahanderry's emotion the girl rushed back to the ruins. Quick and agile as a cat, she sprang from log to log, then suddenly disappeared altogether. Minnihak, who had remained motionless beside the fire, watching the foregoing proceedings with great bewilderment, followed less hastily. Arriving at the spot where the girl had disappeared he paused to look about him. A sharp cry, proceeding from the same pile of logs that had protected Sahanderry, caught his ear.

Squeezing himself between huge beams which hung dangerously suspended in his path, Minnihak dimly discerned Kasba bending over a dark figure. Picking his way carefully, he approached her, and by the uncertain light discovered her supporting the head and shoulders of a man upon her knees. But there was nothing in dress or figure by which to identify him. His clothes were burned to rags, his face was black, and all his hair had been scorched away.

Yet though Minnihak failed to recognize him, Kasba had; and all in a flutter of tenderness words of love poured forth thick and fast, but Roy lay all unconscious, deaf to everything.

CHAPTER XV.

A BITTER SORROW.

"*Nota Kaholthay, Jesus Christ, Notyanayne neoltze nogahneayta Tattaahyenay naso noayl nahnathath doko eethlahse choo. Amen.* (The grace of our Lord, etc.)" The words broke the solemn silence in the distinct but tremulous voice of a young girl; a voice trembling with earnestness as the benedictory blessing passed her lips, every tone filled with suppressed anguish, revealing the agony of a broken heart.

The scene was as solemnly impressive as the words; two open graves rudely hewn from the hard-frozen earth—accomplished by infinite labor after burning fires over the spots for hours—one of them empty while the other revealed a shapeless, undefinable bundle in its cold depths. Beside this one stood three dark muffled figures, sharply outlined against the perpendicular face of rocks. The central figure, the speaker, one of the most touching sights on God's fair earth—was a girl bowed by a great, an overwhelming sorrow, a girl in whose eyes dwelt a look of unutterable despair. This was Kasba; not the young, lovingly-impulsive girl of yesterday, but a girl-woman, a woman of steady and implacable purpose, with feelings so lacerated in the last twenty-

four hours that she had grown numb with pain. Horror upon horror had fallen upon her until further grief could no longer be felt.

On her left was the unmistakable figure of Sahanderry. He stood rigidly erect with eyes fixed sorrowfully on the shadowy object at the bottom of the grave. Tears streamed unchecked down his cheeks and violent sobs convulsed his frame. Venturing to raise his eyes at the girl's concluding words, he threw her a hasty glance; her unnatural composure puzzled him. With a pathetically resigned air she closed the book from which she had been reading, and slowly advancing to the edge of the grave, stood silently gazing into it. The despairing agony in her face was pitiable, for the grave held all that was mortal of her beloved father.

Inconceivably strange it is that Delgezie, being on the outside of the house, should have been killed, while Sahanderry, who lay close to the seat of the explosion, had escaped with his life, in fact was almost uninjured except for being badly scorched and throughly shaken. It would be hard to explain this, or any part of the seemingly miraculous events that followed this disaster. Even the sanest reasoning would fail to convince. The natural inference was that the gunpowder-keg had not sufficient resistance to cause the devastating combustion the incident would lead one to expect and that Delgezie had been killed by some flying object hurtled through the air by the force of the explosion—but this was supposition.

Beside the girl, and completely overcome with grief, was the boy David. He was sobbing audibly.

Stepping back from the grave, Kasba signed to her companions to fill it in. This was the signal for Sahanderry to give full vent to his lamentations while he dropped clods of frozen earth reverently into the hole. These were instantly followed by the sound of dull thuds. Kasba started at the gruesome noise, a startled cry escaped her, but she displayed no further sign of emotion. Stunned and dazed, she stood silently watching the work go on.

The task completed, Sahanderry and David, overcoming their more violent grief, turned to the girl for orders, but remained discreetly silent. Kasba was gazing fixedly at the grave as if her eyes could penetrate the hard, flint-like earth to where the body of her father lay beneath. Suddenly she tottered forward and, uttering a low, despairing cry, fell on her knees.

"*Ay, setah! setah!* (Oh, father, father!)" she moaned, with her face pressed to the icy clods. She remained in this attitude for some time wrestling with a feeling of unutterable loneliness.

Her companions scarcely breathed. Presently she kissed the hard sod, rose quickly and turned slowly away.

Entering the lonely hut she dropped into a seat and remained in an attitude of deep despondency with eyes fixed upon the floor. The entrance of her sorrowing companions passed entirely unnoticed.

Taking pains to make no unnecessary noise, Sahan-

derry first attended to the fire, then seated himself in a gloomy corner, and from this vantage-ground watched the sorrow-stricken girl. David sank on the floor at Kasba's feet, crouching with his head pressed tightly against her knee, and without raising her eyes the girl dropped her hand upon his head and let it rest there in sympathy.

Time dragged on. Deepening shadows crept across the room, gradually enveloping all objects in dismal gloom. The solemn ticking of the clock sounded vastly disproportionate and seemed in the melancholy silence to vibrate with the hum and noise of some mighty machine.

Throughout these dreary hours Kasba sat mute and desolate, taking no heed of time, battling with a confused sense of irreparable loss.

Completely stunned by the succession of terrible shocks, she had been too bewildered to fully understand the significance of the solemn service she had read at the grave-side. The bitter fact that her father was dead and that she had buried him that afternoon filled all her mind, and for the first time in her life her never-failing consolation was denied her. She could not pray, and she was disconsolate indeed, for there was no other comfort in earth or heaven.

"When some beloved voice that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly
And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new—
What hope? what help? what music will undo
That silence to your senses? Not friendship's sign
Not reason's subtle count. Nay, none of these!
Speak Thou, availing Christ! and fill this pause."

But Kasba dare not look heavenward, for bitter, rebellious thoughts had hardened her heart. What had she done that this great trouble should be visited upon her? Delgezie had been both father and mother to her, soothing and tending and caring for her in her infantile afflictions with all the tenderness and affection of a loving mother. From the day of her birth he had surrounded and guarded her young life with the wealth and strength of a passionate love. The deep affection he had borne his poor dead wife had been transferred to the child she had left to his care. She became the joy of his life; his one thought was for her happiness, his one aim her comfort. They had been all in all to each other, and that God-fearing man had been cut down in an instant, without even the mournful consolation of a parting word. As the knowledge of her loss gained upon her the loneliness of her position grew correspondingly distinct. Poor, weary, sorrow-stricken girl, tired and harassed by her multitudinous duties, confused from want of rest and sleep, she sat buried in the perplexities of a series of most singularly strange and terrible happenings.

Yet she had still another duty to fulfil, another painful task to perform—a task, if possible, more keenly agonizing than the burying of her loved father. In a corner of the room lay the body of Roy Thursby, the man she had loved with all the strength of her simple young heart.

Roy's body had been carried to Delgezie's hut, but all attempts at resuscitation had proved futile, and

it now lay on Kasba's bed, covered with a white sheet, awaiting burial. The body, however, had not yet been sewn up in canvas, as was customary immediately after death. This still remained to be done, although the empty grave beside Delgezie's yawned for it.

Silently in the gloomy darkness Kasba sat in a procrastinating mood. The stern burial custom of her race and a solemn duty to the dead called urgently to her to complete those last sad rites, but love with equal persistence implored for longer respite. Tremulously she shrank from the heart-rending ordeal of hiding forever the face she loved so ardently. Yet she well knew the task to be unavoidable, she would allow no other hand to touch that dear form, to cover his dear body with the garment of the grave.

The darkness grew intense. The feeble gleam of twilight from the window failed to pierce the room's pitchy blackness any longer. The noisy clock ticked on incessantly. Silent and motionless the three figures sat like three grim statues, so inert were they.

At length a weird, ghostly sound broke the deathly stillness. With one accord Kasba and Sahanderry started to their feet. They gazed toward each other with horrified eyes, each striving to pierce the black pall which hung between them, to discover if either was the author of the strange sound. David cowered upon the floor.

The clock ticked ominously.

The two figures stood speechless.

Again that ghostly sound, and now it was like a deep, long-drawn sigh.

Simultaneously Kasba and Sahanderry darted forward—Kasba to the bed and Sahanderry to the door, through which he vanished.

Kasba softly bent over the indistinct figure lying there. With senses strained to the utmost she paused, breathlessly listening. Hours might have passed, or only moments; she could not have told. Again that deep, sighing sound. It came from beneath the white sheet upon the bed.

With a sharp cry Kasba fell upon her knees. With outstretched hands and upturned eyes, "Almighty God," she cried in accents of exceeding joy, "I thank Thee for this miracle." Then for the first time since her father's death she fell into a storm of weeping.

The figure sighed again and slightly stirred.

Springing to her feet Kasba softly uncovered Roy's face and then quickly lit the lamp and held it in her trembling hand. The light fell upon the form of Roy Thursby. He lay calm and still, and Kasba waited with bated breath in an agony of suspense, her heart beating tumultuously. Presently there was another sigh and Roy's eyes slowly opened. The girl started and trembled as he turned his head toward her, but there was no gleam of recognition in his eyes.

Kasba stirred uneasily. Her heart beat so for a moment that it well-nigh choked her.

The slight sound caught his ears. His lips moved —" Who is there?" The words came slowly; they were spoken only by great effort and scarcely above his breath.

" It is Kasba," said the girl when she could control her voice sufficiently to speak. " There was an accident and you were hurt. I—they brought you to my father's hut."

" Why—are — we — in — darkness?" asked Roy with infinite labor.

Kasba stared at him in horrified amazement, for the light she held fell full upon his face.

At this moment an ejaculation from behind caused her to glance back. In the doorway stood the boy David with an expression of terrified wonder on his face, and towering over his shoulder, with his head pushed well forward, was Sahanderry who stood awestruck. His mouth was wide open, and his piercing black eyes, large and round, betrayed the amazement he felt.

Kasba beckoned him to come forward, and putting the boy aside, he cautiously entered. With eyes intent upon the countenance of his master, Sahanderry drew near the bed. Then realizing that Roy was in truth alive, that by some seeming miracle he had returned from the very brink of the grave, he sprang impulsively forward, and clutching one of Roy's hands, burst into tears.

" Oh, Bekothrie! Bekothrie! I am glad—me!" he sobbed.

This miraculous escape from the dead was more in accord with his wonderful faith than that Roy the all-powerful could be overcome, and his jubilation knew no bounds.

"But, Sahanderry," said Roy, still speaking in a low, weak voice, "tell me, why are we in the dark?" There was a slight tone of apprehension in his voice, as if he divined that some evil was being kept from him.

Sahanderry ceased his sobbing and gazed with perplexity at Kasba.

"Why—," he began, but Kasba with a swift gesture clapped her hand over his mouth.

Silent as the motion was, the slight, almost imperceptible sound made by the girl in shifting her position caught Roy's attention. He lay with a painfully strained look upon his face, and in an attitude of intently listening. No one spoke. The man and girl watched him with fast beating hearts, a look of horror growing in their eyes, for a terrible suspicion gradually took possession of them.

"Will — you — not — speak?" he said hoarsely. "Speak, why—is—there—no—light?"

Sahanderry glanced in consternation at his companion. He moved uneasily. His lips parted as if in speech, but he answered never a word.

Roy waited, breathing quickly. Presently a look of suspicion passed over his face. "Speak, man, I command you!" he cried with greater force. "Is there a light?"

Throwing a desperate, imploring glance at Kasba, Sahanderry wrung his hands. "Yes," he faltered, "but—," he stopped suddenly, the unutterable despair on his master's face held him tongue-tied.

For a few moments Roy lay silent, completely overcome by the sudden, appalling revelation; then, clutching convulsively at his eyes: "Oh, my God! my God! I am blind!" he moaned.

CHAPTER XVI.

RETRIBUTION.

The first grey streaks of a dawning day crept stealthily across the horizon, and gaining strength in their silent progress finally revealed a rough brush-wood camp esconsed in a good-sized bluff of trees.

The multitudinous tracks and well-trodden snow, the number of mutilated tree-stumps standing white and ragged—evidence that a quantity of wood had been cut quite lately—several large holes, blackened as by fires, and the general untidy aspect of the whole, told that the camp had been in use several days.

Early though the hour, the camp appeared deserted, but a closer inspection discovered the shadowy figure of a man seated in a corner of the barricade. He was muffled in a hairy-coat, with the hood drawn well over his head, and he sat silent and motionless, in the position of one wrapt in peaceful slumber, or absorbed in deep thought.

There were several peculiarities about this camp. Immediately behind the quiet figure a number of green spruce trees had been arranged to form an additional protection against the blast of a biting wind, while a pile of wood lay inside and close to the man's hand. These unusual features spoke strongly

of the presence of an invalid, or one incapacitated in some manner from moving easily about. There was one other odd thing, a revolver lay at the man's right hand, fully charged and with its butt toward him, as if for instant use.

Slowly the fire burned down, and with the curious, faltering gesture of one feeling in the dark the man put out his hand and carefully replenished it, then again subsided within himself. The new fuel burned briskly; tiny flames started from the dying embers and caught desperately at the fresh fuel, and gathering strength in the consumption thereof they burst upward with fierce wild roars and lit the camp for many yards around, revealing the figure and features of its lonely occupant. It was Roy Thursby. Yet was it Roy Thursby? It was like him, but with a look of great misery stamped upon him. His face was ashy-grey. His eyes seemed fixed upon the leaping flames, but, alas! he only knew of their close presence by his acute senses of hearing and feeling, for he was totally blind. The longing, wistful expression—so pathetic in the faces of the blind—was already showing upon his face. He sat with bent head, leaning slightly forward, musing in mournful retrospect upon the last few days. They had been to him nothing but excitement and horror. Truly the shot that had left him lying senseless, cutting a deep furrow across his skull and stunning him for many hours, had saved him the harrowing, blood-curdling, diabolical details of Broom's subsequent deeds, but the fearful discovery his returning consciousness had

revealed was, perhaps, the most terrible a human being could experience.

Blind! Oh, the misery in that one word! What desolate loneliness! What unfathomable despair!

Roy's passionate prayers to God to release him from a long, grim night of unlifting darkness were painful beyond words to those who witnessed them. It was with feelings of the greatest relief that his companions finally saw him sink into a state of apathy. From that hour Roy was as one who has some awful fear upon him; he started at the slightest sound. None save himself knew how bitter were his feelings, how acute his anguish. And always from his soul this cry went up: "What have I done to deserve this terrible affliction?" His whole life was blasted. All his bright dreams, all his ambitions, were roughly brought to an end, and from a man, young, strong, resolute, he had become more pitiably helpless than a little child—all by the evil-doing of a reckless, useless man-animal to whom he had been rescuer and friend. Alone, and solely by the strength of his personality, he had succeeded in a difficult and dangerous enterprise, and with pardonable pride awaited his reward and the approbation of a powerful and generous Company. But now all enterprise, all ambition, lay dead, and he must spend the rest of his days away from companionship of his kind. He had already fought this out with himself. The battle had been fierce, but short and decisive. His keen appreciation of what was due to others had won the victory. Why should he go to the front, return to civilization,

to Lena whom he passionately loved—he, a useless incumbrance, compelled by the very nature of his affliction to depend upon others for even the most trifling offices? Better far that she should believe that he had met his death in the explosion—Delgezie's grave would lend color to that belief—and when the first bitter sorrow of the blow had worn off she might still be happy with another. Why then should he doom her to wear out her life by the side of a hopeless, melancholy invalid? Besides, he shrank from exposing his extreme helplessness to other eyes, even though they were the eyes of a sympathizing friend. Yes! He would spend the rest of his life in the company of the faithful Kasba and Sahanderry, at some camp which they might make in the desolate solitude, far from all possibility of encounter with any white man.

Discovering what she fully believed to be Roy's dead body, Kasba had despatched Minnihak with a message to Acpa, acquainting him with the trader's death and requesting him to come and take charge of Fort Future *pro tem.* Therefore Roy had decided not to remain at the Fort any longer than it would take to make adequate preparations for a long trip, but to proceed by easy stages to a place known to Sahanderry, where a stay might be protracted to any length.

But a startling incident had compelled them to fly Fort Future with scarcely any preparation—Broom had appeared upon the scene.

Sahanderry and David were away from home and

Kasba was outside gathering an armful of kindling. Her first intimation of the ruffian's presence was a rude arm around her waist, and a voice in her ear, which said:

"Now, my bonny Kasba! I've come back for you!"

In utter surprise and consternation the girl gave a startled cry which rang out sharply, and, caught up by the echoes, it was thrown on and on till it died away in the distance.

Hearing the cry Roy sprang to his feet within the house. In the excitement of the moment he forgot strength and courage could avail him nothing. He stumbled across the room but could not find the door. It was in this awful moment that he realized how utterly helpless he was, how miserably incapable to protect those in his care—those who, accustomed to a lifelong protection, were totally unable to think for themselves in moments of great crisis. Listening intently he could distinguish a noise made by scuffling on crisp snow. He knew it was Kasba who cried, that she was being molested. Oh, for the gift of sight for one moment! His agony at being unable to render the girl assistance was so intense that he sobbed like a child.

Suddenly the scuffling ceased. Then there was another cry and the sound of departing footsteps.

Stumbling about the room, Roy again made frenzied efforts to find the door, but struck against something and fell to the ground. He tore at his eyes, then, calling loudly upon his Creator, and in sheer

desperation, shouted with the full force of his lungs. Hearing the voice of a man he verily believed dead, Broom dropped the girl and staggered back as if shot. Then with a white, scared face he dashed away, as if pursued by some ghostly visitant.

He had scarcely disappeared before Sahanderry and David returned. Sahanderry's great trepidation at hearing of the adventure plainly told Roy that he could not be depended upon to protect Kasba, for, although he was unable to see Sahanderry's terror, the Indian's tremulous voice betrayed him.

With the quick decision of an ever-resourceful mind, Roy ordered his companions to prepare for a hasty flight, so that when Broom returned—for Roy felt that he would return—he might find the girl far beyond his reach.

So a few things were gathered quickly together and packed upon a dog-sled and soon Fort Future was deserted.

For the first few days the party travelled incessantly, only pausing for the scantiest of meals and an occasional short sleep; but when they arrived at the spot described at the beginning of this chapter, Roy, who rode on the sled, discovered that Kasba was suffering greatly from the hardships of the long and severe trip; despite her heroic efforts to appear thoroughly alert and quite rested after each short nap, she was unable to hide her weariness of voice and movement from his quick ear, and at the risk of being overtaken he had ordered a few days' halt.

On the morning of which we write, Sahanderry

and David had left the camp early to go some distance on a hunting expedition, for the food supply was getting low. Kasba had wandered into the bush and Roy was left alone with his bitterness of spirit. To have run away from Broom, to have deserted his post, was gall to his soul. With an ejaculation he flung more wood on the fire.

Just then a slight girlish figure crept cautiously to where he sat and stealthily reached for the revolver. Grasping the barrel, she was drawing it gently toward her when a hand descended heavily upon hers and held it in a vice-like grip.

"Who is that?" demanded Roy, turning his sightless eyes upon her.

The girl stifled a scream. Roy's sudden action had surprised and greatly startled her. "It is Kasba," she said, almost crying with vexation.

"And why do you steal into camp in this manner?" asked Roy sternly. The girl's peculiar behavior had made him apprehensive of danger.

After hesitating a moment Kasba uttered the one word—"Broom!"

Roy's face hardened, his whole body stiffened ominously, for he conjectured that his enemy was in close proximity. "The villain!" he muttered. Then, releasing the girl's hand, he held out his own and demanded that the revolver be put in it.

Reluctantly Kasba complied with his demand.

Then, "Where is he?" enquired Roy in a low, tense voice.

"At some distance. He is with the Eskimo Ocpic,

in camp and asleep. I discovered them and came back for the revolver."

"And why?"

"That I might kill him," hissed the girl, with flashing eyes and her bosom heaving with uncontrollable excitement. Then, "Oh, give me the revolver, Bekothrie, and let me go," she pleaded; for her bitter hatred toward her persecutor had completely overcome the terror she had always felt for him.

"No! That is my work," said Roy sternly. "Lead me to him."

The girl had been taught strict obedience, and did not pause to argue with Roy as to the improbability of his being able while laboring under his terrible affliction to accomplish his revenge by shooting Broom. Besides she, like Sahanderry, had a deep-set belief in Roy's infallibility. With hasty fingers she fastened on his snowshoes. Then, taking his hand, she gently led him forth.

The way was rough and tortuous. With her disengaged hand and her strong body the girl forced a path through the bushes so that none might touch him in passing. Their progress was necessarily slow and laborious, their footsteps uncertain.

After a time, which seemed interminable to Roy, Kasba halted. They had arrived at a poorly constructed camp. Two figures muffled in *kaip-puks* lay side by side within it. Over the feet of one a rough pilot-coat had been thrown. Kasba had come across

the camp, and recognizing the coat as belonging to Broom, divined that he lay beneath it.

"We are there, Bekothrie," said Kasba softly. Despite her efforts to control it, excitement had unstrung her nerves and thrown a quiver into her voice.

"Point the revolver," commanded Roy, fiercely.

Kasba hesitated. What if it was not Broom after all, but some innocent person? But only a second did she falter, for the remembrance of Broom's diabolical doings caused implacable wrath to surge within her. Cautiously she led Roy forward a few more steps, then halted and with a steady hand pointed the extended revolver at the sleeper's head.

"Now!" she whispered.

Roy stiffened his arm and slipped a finger on the trigger. He did not hesitate to kill Broom while he slept. Broom's crimes had been too heinous to permit of mercy. A grim look came into Roy's face; his finger was pressing the trigger with fearful intent, when the bright face of a young girl flashed before his mind's eye and in his imagination a clear voice repeated the word's of Lena's letter in his ear: "*For in my opinion it is murder for a man to take another's life, no matter what the circumstances that seem to extenuate it.*"

Then, to Kasba's surprise, instead of firing, he dropped his hand to his side, letting the weapon fall to the ground. "I cannot do it!" he cried hoarsely. "Take me away."

The girl stared at him, vastly amazed at this sud-

den, inexplicable change from grim determination to profound helplessness. Then obediently she caught his hand and led him away.

They had scarcely turned before the figure sprang to its feet. It was Broom! His eyes rolled in his head and he trembled like an aspen leaf. With a ghastly white face he stood staring after them as they slowly retraced their steps.

He stared, motionless in his astonishment, for he had awakened just in time to hear Roy's words, and the revolver lying half buried in the snow was all that was necessary to explain that his life had been spared. Then, too, he was overpowered at the sight of Roy's affliction. Just how he became aware of this it is hard to determine—perhaps from Roy's words, "Take me away," or his faltering footsteps, or the sight of the girl leading him by the hand; perhaps the three combined. However, the sight of the once active Roy moving slowly, laboriously away overwhelmed him with remorse. In a flash the heinousness of his acts came home to him. Sinking upon his knees in the snow he hid his face in his hands, rocking himself and groaning like one demented, taking no heed of time, nor that his hands were exposed to the bitter cold wind. When at last he rose to his feet he staggered like a drunken man; the strength dependent upon his feverish excitement of the last few days had suddenly left him, leaving him as weak as one just recovered from a long and severe illness. He had paid a terrible toll for his mad fits of passion; his eyes were sunken, his cheekbones pro-

truded. Scarcely ever sleeping or eating, his thoughts had been concentrated on possessing the girl. Overcome with baffled fury at discovering her gone from the Fort, he had travelled hot-foot in pursuit, but now that she was within his reach, now that he had discovered Roy powerless to protect her, his feelings underwent a sudden revulsion. The spark of humanity that had long lain dormant under all his recklessness burned bright at the sight of Roy's pathetic figure, and all idea of further pursuit faded from his mind as completely as if it had never filled it. In its stead a raging desire to go far away from the man he had injured possessed him. His mad desire to possess Kasba, to secure the witnesses of his diabolical acts, and by some measures not quite plain to him to prevent them from bringing him to account, were forgotten in his anxiety, which in the weak state of mind rapidly developed into monomania—to place a great distance between himself and them. And the dogged, mad glare of a set purpose was in his eyes as with a savage kick he awoke his companion, crying: "Get up, you black devil, we are going back."

Ocpic grumblingly crawled from beneath his blankets, rose sullenly to his feet, and stood staring inquiringly at his companion. Shifting his gaze, he caught sight of the fresh tracks in the snow, noted that they led to and from their camp, and discovered the revolver. For a moment he stood stupidly looking, his eyes protruding as if he could scarcely believe his senses, then slowly he went and picked it up.

With a yell and a spring Broom was upon him, wresting the weapon away. Ocpic scowled, but retired before Broom's look of fury.

"Get to —— out of this!" cried Broom, with a flourish of the revolver.

A slight smattering of English and Broom's gestures sufficiently enlightened Ocpic. They were to turn back. He stood thunderstruck. To stop the pursuit meant starvation, for they had no food nor any ammunition with which to provide food. In their impetuous pursuit they had travelled night and day, throwing themselves down to snatch a few hours' sleep only when they could go no farther. Once they had been awakened by an explosion. They had neglected to push the burning embers back from the camp before retiring and the fire had caught the brush; spreading to the place where their food and ammunition had been carelessly thrown, it had burned up the food and set off the gunpowder. From that time they had lived on a few handfuls of pemmican which had been accidentally left in a bag outside, and thus escaped the fire. But the last of this had been consumed for their scanty supper and they were now without a crumb to make breakfast.

With pantomimic gestures and broken English Ocpic tried to make his companion understand that to turn back would be madness, that only their catching up to Roy's party would save them. They had food, perhaps more than they needed; at any rate he and Broom could take what they had, and he glanced significantly at the revolver.

But Broom would have none of it. In his changed mood he would protect Roy, and with his life if need be. He stood, for the moment, a man transformed.

There was an uneasy pause, while Ocpic cudgeled his crafty brain: What to do? To him Broom's sudden reversion of tactics was a bewildering puzzle. What had happened while he slept? Ocpic would have given worlds to know. That someone had visited the camp the freshly made tracks and the presence of the strange revolver gave convincing proof. But who? And why had they gone away? There could be no one in those parts but the trader and his party, or perhaps a wandering gang of Eskimos. But a man of Ocpic's malignant nature could not conceive of Roy as visiting the camp and leaving it without so much as laying a disturbing finger upon the men who had brought such disaster upon himself and his companions. Yet it could not have been Eskimos, for they did not carry revolvers.

Ocpic's cogitations were brought sharply to an end by Broom, who presented the revolver at his head. "Get out of this, I tell you," he shouted. Surely he was going mad, for to turn back was an act of madness.

Still there was the vague chance of meeting with wandering Eskimos who would assist them with food, and small though the chance at that time of the year, it was infinitely better to take it than refuse and meet certain death. So argued Ocpic. He had once witnessed Broom's exploits with the revolver and had great respect for his markmanship. He possessed a

vivid remembrance of the incident which had caused Roy to drop like a log.

Sullenly Ocpic faced about and with head down started to retrace his steps of the day before. Broom followed closely, driving the Eskimo before him.

Thus hours passed. Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, the creak of their snowshoes was as regular as the ticking of a clock, cutting off the yards of endless track as a clock ticks off the moments of the hour. Hunger gnawed at Ocpic's vitals. He was ravenously hungry and fit to drop with fatigue, but the stern, relentless hand clutching the revolver waved him on, ever on.

About the noon-hour Broom called a halt and the Eskimo dropped in his tracks and sat on his haunches, taking the greatest degree of rest out of the short respite. Broom leaned against a fallen tree; he was breathing hard and appeared much distressed. The Eskimo's glittering eyes took in the situation. The white man was tiring. Good!

Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch—soon they were off again. Nothing but dogged grit upheld Broom. Crunch, crunch, Ocpic trudged steadily on, craftily saving himself against the time when his companion would become spent.

So the day passed and the gloom of an approaching night gathered around them. In a subconscious way Broom was aware that he was starving, that he was suffering from extreme fatigue, but an indomitable will and a mortal fear drove him on despite his physical sufferings. In his frenzied brain there was

but one idea. The Eskimo had evil designs on Roy Thursby, therefore he must drive him away. His own vile part in what had gone before was completely forgotten—all knowledge of the past was swallowed up in the vital present. In his changed mood Roy was a hero, a martyr, a man to be worshipped, protected, saved at all costs.

Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch; the night fell and the moon rose gloriously, shedding a pale blue light over the silent white world in which these two plodding figures seemed to be the only things possessed of animation.

Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch. Perceptibly Broom's strength was waning. He began to stumble over nothing, to draw his breath in broken gasps. The incessant crunch, crunch of his snowshoes beat on his brain like a hammer. The earth heaved and rocked, his legs dragged heavily, he staggered in his gait. At last he fell, but soon by sheer effort of will struggled to his feet. Ocpic, plodding in front, noted the circumstance with a triumphant smile. He did not turn his head, continuing his mechanical walking as if nothing had happened. But imperceptibly he quickened his stride. With ears strained to the utmost he took cognizance of his companion's rapidly failing strength, and slowly widened the distance between them.

Crunch, crunch, Ocpic was rapidly drawing away. Confident in his ability to escape, he chuckled silently. But he was not quite easy in his mind, the revolver still causing him a little apprehension. How-

ever he was almost out of range; a few more steps and, presuming on his companion's preoccupation, he lengthened the gap.

Slowly it dawned upon Broom that Ocpic was getting farther and farther distant. Suddenly he divined the cause—Ocpic was running away.

With a cry of mad rage he started in pursuit, calling loudly to him to stop. Ocpic stopped, hesitated, then started off again. Broom followed, rocking from side to side as he ran. He fell—got up—ran a few yards, then stumbled and fell again.

With a loud curse he struggled to his feet for the last time; he was beaten in the race but not yet foiled in his purpose. Concentrating his remaining strength he drew himself erect, took deliberate aim and fired.

Ocpic uttered a wild yell, staggered on for a few more steps, and then pitched forward. Simultaneously with the pistol's report Broom collapsed and fell. The last spark of his vitality had flickered out. Two huddled forms lay prone upon the snow, and for a little time all about was still and silent.

At length Ocpic straightened himself out and tried to rise, but fell back, groaning. Again and again he tried, and with each attempt a dark blot widened upon the snow. Not to be outdone, he began to crawl toward Broom. Slowly, painfully, a few feet at the time, he crept along, and a thin dark line following in his wake discolored the snow.

Broom sighed and opened his eyes. The red glare

was gone. He lay quite still; the long trail was at an end and he needed rest and food—yes, possibly food. But for the time being he was almost comfortable. He was conscious of stabbing pains in his ears, and that his face and hands were rapidly becoming stiff, but what was that? The time was past when small things mattered. He was very comfortable—and—Ocpic was creeping nearer.

Never in his life had Broom felt so happy. A heavy burden seemed to have dropped from his shoulders. He felt as light as a feather. In sheer ecstasy and with a long sigh of contentment he closed his eyes—Ocpic was quite close!

Broom's mind now began to wander. He murmured to himself, living over again events in his chequered career. Then a restful look came on his face and he babbled of boyhood days; of days—long, long ago—before he had grown into a hardened reprobate.

And now Ocpic was at his side! And drawing a knife!

Broom! Broom! Awake! Open your eyes, for an assassin lurks near!

Broom smiled and spoke softly a woman's name.

Raising himself on one elbow Ocpic bent over him! Something glittered in his hand.

Opening his eyes, Broom smiled up into the little rat-like orbs above him, which darted back malignant hate.

Suddenly, with a fleeting return of consciousness,

he recognized Ocpic. He gazed perplexedly into the malevolent face of the little Eskimo, and then he remembered.

Ocpic upraised the knife.

Broom chuckled. "Well, you damned Husky!" he said, "So I did for you all right, eh? Come now, give me my quietus and I'll race you into hell!"

Then, as if Ocpic accepted the challenge, the knife descended.

The silence of the grave lay over the white world. There on the snow, almost side by side, lay two lifeless figures with distorted faces and eyes that stared at the stars. In the far distance was an indefinable object moving. Slowly, stealthily it approached. It was an animal. Pausing, the creature threw back its head and howled. Soon other dark objects appeared. They were wolves assembling for the feast.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

If Roy had not been with them, the Indians would certainly never have found themselves in such a desperate plight. They would never have thought of attempting to cross the river, for they understood better than anyone the portentous signs of a "break-up." But Roy in a black humor had decided to go on, and his word was law. Therefore, what else could they do? What was left them to do? They would as soon have thought of questioning the wisdom of the Creator as disputing Roy's judgment—probably sooner. For such was their habit of obedience, a habit handed down by generations of men who had been Company's servants. In truth Sahanderry had turned positively grey with terror when Roy had decided to cross. However, though he was not one of the bravest of men, what he did was not easy. It required considerable self-control to lead the way, as was his duty, for it was like walking to almost certain death.

Since leaving the spot where they had as they thought left Broom asleep, the difficulties of their journey had grown with every passing day; indeed, the last few days' travel, toiling ankle-deep in slush, had been very hard work, for spring had come upon

them and the snow was disappearing as if by magic, and though they had not many miles to go, the nearer they approached their destination the slower had been their progress, and this had irritated Roy almost to a frenzy. Consequently the signs that should have warned him to stay had been the very things to urge him on. Clearly his usual good judgment had been at fault; and his blindness could not have been wholly responsible for this, as his hearing had been preternaturally sharpened thereby and there could have been no possible doubt as to his having heard the frequent significant explosions up the river, which had been loud enough to waken the dead, so to speak. Moreover he had had a good idea of the character of the river, therefore these recurring reports should have been sufficient to warn him. But truth to tell his mood had become fierce and reckless, and brooked no control.

Howbeit the little party found themselves on a surface of quaking, rocking ice that threatened to "break up" and move out at any moment. Just where they were the river was of considerable width and the ice was very soft, and they were in a very bad way indeed.

Rain had fallen during the past week; floods of the creeks and larger tributaries were pouring into the river, and the great volume of water was lifting the ice, and, as it strained and labored from this great pressure, the explosions grew louder, nearer and more frequent. Presently, far up the stream, a huge billow of straining, tumbling ice-cakes reared its head

and came steadily toward them. Behind this mighty billow was the spring freshet against which nothing could stand. Meanwhile, his eyes wide with terror, Sahanderry slipped and stumbled ahead of the poor miserable dogs, who strained and tore at their traces, half running, half swimming in places, where the water was deep. The sled and everything on it were streaming wet, for at times it was almost entirely submerged in deep holes, filled with water. The dogs were urged on by the boy David, who, though almost played out by dragging the sled, still "drove them up" vigorously; turning ever and anon to look back at Kasba, who was following slowly, painfully, behind, and leading Roy by the hand.

By and by there was a ruder shock than any that had gone before and the whole ice field became in motion. Startled at last out of his indifference, Roy gave an exclamation of concern and stood still, but his expression did not change; he was perfectly cool and self-possessed; the sort of coolness that comes upon strong men in moments of danger. The grinding of the ice was terrible to hear, and soon the whole ice field was moving down stream. Roy, now thoroughly alive to their situation, turned to Kasba: "The river is 'going out'?" he said, interrogatively.

The girl paused to control her voice before she answered.

"Yes, Bekothrie," she said quite steadily. "It is on the move." She neither wept nor trembled, though she fully realized the danger they were in.

"Can we return to the bank?" asked Roy quietly.

The girl looked back. The ice behind them was piling along the shore in impassable confusion. "No, Bekothrie," she said, "we cannot go back."

"Where are the others?" he asked.

"Far in front," answered the girl. "They are waiting for us."

"Then send them on," said Roy peremptorily. "Let them save themselves."

Thereupon Kasba waved Sahanderry and David on. The man at once struck off, but the boy paused as if loath to go. At that the girl frantically repeated her gesticulations and the boy drove up his dogs again, but with apparent reluctance. Soon man, boy and dogs were lost to sight in the confusion of ice.

"They are gone, Bekothrie," affirmed the girl.

"Very well," said Roy, "let us go too." The girl took his hand again, and they went on their way. Their progress was necessarily slow. Their path was strewn with pitfalls for Roy's feet, and soon the girl was panting from her exertions in keeping him upright, but within her delicate body there dwelt an unconquerable spirit.

Reaching a comparatively smooth surface they skated along with increased speed. There were puddles of water which they could not avoid. Cracks more or less wide open barred their way, and guided by the girl Roy crossed them, jumping easily or exerting himself to the utmost, according to the emergency. But more than one opening was too wide to allow of any assistance from Kasba's helping hand, and he had to make the attempt entirely by

her direction. All this was very wearying, for however careful he might be, he was bound to expend a great deal of strength to no purpose. It is one thing to jump with eye and muscle acting together, and another to do it blindly, as everybody knows. Poor Roy!

At times there were gaps which neither could leap. They skirted these, walking as fast as possible. Out of breath and entirely worn out with fatigue, Roy would often fall in a heap upon the ice to rest. He was cold and disheartened, and would have given up altogether if it had not been for the girl's presence, for he valued his life not a jot since his terrible affliction. Therefore his own danger appealed less to him than the girl's situation. It seemed such a terrible thing that she should lose her bright young life in trying to save his, which was worthless. He well knew that by herself the girl could have crossed the river safely, for she was fearless and as agile as a cat, springing and climbing with the greatest ease.

Then the ice started to rock beneath their feet. "Hurry—hurry!" cried Kasba, dragging him forward with the desperate energy of a man. "We have not a moment to lose if we would save our lives."

"Leave me," said Roy withdrawing his hand, "and save yourself."

For a moment the girl gazed at him in horrified surprise. "Leave you!" she exclaimed in a tone that was unmistakable. "I will not leave you." There was a power in her tone that struck him with amazement.

"But I keep you back."

"Nevertheless, I will not leave you," repeated the girl firmly.

In spite of their desperate situation Roy could not help smiling. He realized that their positions had suddenly changed; it was the girl's spirit which now predominated. "Very well, then," he said, giving her his hand again. "Go on." The thundering of the broken ice floes, the grinding of the smaller pieces against each other, made conversation difficult. Here and there the force of the flood piled up mountains of cakes which, after a moment, toppled over with a deafening crash.

Presently there was a shock which capped all others, and the ice field stopped. They knew that somewhere below it had become jammed, and that an added peril threatened them, for the river was rising each moment, and if the ice did not overwhelm them it seemed that the flood must. The cakes rocked threateningly, collided together, then stopped, but the jam could not hold them back long.

Stumbling, struggling, striving, Kasba dragged Roy along. They were pitiful sights, these two. Their hands and feet were bleeding, their moccasins had long since worn out, as had the duffles and hose beneath them, and their clothes were cut and torn. Kasba's dress hung in ribbons and was soaking wet, impeding her movements, while Roy's knees showed through great holes, the result of many tumbles. Every step he took was an effort, a terrible effort, still

he dare not give up and let the girl die, for she would not leave him, he knew.

Slipping and sliding they struggled on.

Presently, to Kasba's horror, they came to a strait of dark water at least five feet across, while on either hand huge piles of ice cakes blocked their way. The situation was desperate. The girl stopped dead, holding Roy back. "We cannot go on," she said. "We have come to a very wide crack." Then she laughed as lightly as if there were no such thing as danger. Roy heard her and understood; she was pretending to be gay in order to make it easier for him.

"How wide is it?" he demanded, steadying his voice with difficulty. The situation was very nerve-racking.

"It is very wide," returned the girl. "The widest yet. You must not attempt it; you will fall in."

"I'll not," replied Roy with emphasis. "Can you manage it?"

"Yes, Bekothrie," declared the girl bravely, her voice quite unshaken. Then she laughed again in the same way.

"Well, jump it, then," said Roy, "and I will follow."

The girl hesitated a second, then with a coolness that was wonderful she sprang across, but it took all her agility to clear the gap. With a white, set face she stood looking anxiously back at him, across the deep, dark water. "Turn a little to the left,

Bekothrie," she directed. "That will do. Now advance a few steps. Stop! You are now on the edge. Spring straight forward and I will catch you." The girl braced her feet to receive the shock, while poor, blind Roy bunched his muscles for the effort.

"Now!" shouted the girl, and stood with hands extended ready to receive him.

At the word Roy launched himself forward, but at the same instant the ice rocked beneath his feet and almost threw him down; recovering himself somewhat, he made his spring, but it fell short and he plunged into the water. Kasba uttered a cry of horror and despair, but stooping till she was herself in peril of falling she grabbed him by the collar with both hands and held him up. It was a terrible moment. The girl skilfully shifted her clutch to Roy's wrists, first to one hand, then the other, grasping them with a hold like steel; then, bracing her feet with a strength inconceivable in so frail a body, a strength far beyond her years and size, she lifted him so high that he could relieve her of his weight by sprawling on his chest across the ice and by wriggling his body assist her to haul him out.

Then Roy staggered to his feet with an unsteady laugh, but the girl, who stood breathing hard from the efforts of her superhuman exertions, looked anxiously into his face and saw that his teeth were chattering and that his lips were blue. He was shivering from head to foot.

"You are cold," she said, greatly alarmed.

"I'm not," denied Roy shortly, but for the life of

him he could not keep his voice steady. "Come, let us get on," and unaided he tottered forward a few steps, then swayed and would have fallen had not the girl supported him.

"You must rest," she said decisively, studying his face closely. "Sit down." Taking his arm, she guided him to a nearby hummock. "Sit down," she repeated; "the ice is jammed and for the moment we are safe." She tried to speak cheerfully, but Roy's desperate case made her sick at heart.

For a wonder Roy obeyed, though to be strictly truthful he could not do otherwise. His brain was beginning to reel from exhaustion, and he fell rather than sat down. Every bone and muscle ached; his breath came in gasps. The girl seated herself beside him, and quite unconsciously his head dropped back and rested against her shoulder. She took one of his hands softly in both hers while she gazed into his face. She loved him more than her own life. Poor little thing, how her heart fluttered, how the blood rushed to her face! She drew him closer and covered him as much as she could with her arms, trying to put some warmth into his icy-cold body. She was afraid that he would hear her heart, which was beating like a hammer. She was for the moment indescribably happy. Careless of any danger to herself, she looked up into his face as he leaned against her and held him tighter. There was not a trace of fear in her own face, nor indeed of any feeling but love and sympathy. If they were to die, she would prefer to

die like that. What did anything matter since they were together?

Roy seemed to divine her thoughts. "What's the use of your remaining?" he asked. "You cannot save me by losing your life." He spoke almost roughly and the girl started as if struck a blow.

"I am not frightened," she answered quietly. "It will not be hard to die."

Roy turned half round, as if to look into her face; in fact, his sightless eyes seemed to be fixed upon hers. "You are a very brave girl, Kasba," he said tenderly; "the bravest I have ever known. Why are you so good to me?" The words were scarcely spoken before he regretted them; a distressed look came to his face instantly, for he remembered and was deeply touched by the sincerity of her love for him.

The girl said nothing for a moment, but looked at him with a smile of unutterable tenderness, which he could not see. "I love you!" she said simply. "Now you really know, at last."

"I knew already," declared Roy. His voice rang painfully, for he understood how she loved him as he had not understood before, and it seemed as though it must have somehow been his fault. The full strength and nobility and devotion of her passion for him rushed on him. For the first time he saw the splendid heroism of which her untrained nature would have been capable had she met with a different fate, and it filled him with a passion of remorse. "Poor child! poor child! What have I done to be worthy of such love?" he murmured, and feeling for

her hand, he found and pressed it, almost caressingly. Then, drawing her to him, he felt for her face, and, taking it between his hands, he drew it closer and kissed her smooth young forehead. "Poor child," he repeated sadly. There was a shadow of pain in the words.

The girl's eyes filled and she uttered something that sounded like a sob.

At that instant there was a tremendous explosion below, and soon the ice field started to move again down the current.

The girl started up, and seizing Roy's hand she pulled him to his feet. "On! on!" she urged. "We must not stop here. The jam has burst and we shall be carried out to sea." As the field moved mountains of ice, which had piled up because of the jam, toppled over with deafening noise, and for a time no other sound could be heard. Guiding Roy, the girl moved forward as swiftly as possible. The fates were good to them. Before them, and reaching almost to the opposite shore, was one vast stretch of smooth ice. Once upon that they made better progress and Kasba grew hopeful. Moving their feet as if skating, they rapidly drew nearer to the shore. Soon Kasba was able to make out the figures of Sahanderry and the boy David, who stood in perilous positions on top of huge blocks of ice, which the action of the flood had piled up on the shore during the jam. They were waving frantically.

"We are almost there," Kasba shouted encouragingly in Roy's ear: "We shall be saved yet."

But Roy shook his head. He could not understand the words addressed him. Nevertheless he did his best to keep up as the girl dragged him forward.

They were now close, but the ice they were on was fast going down stream, and the two on the ice wall were compelled to scramble along in order to keep abreast. Presently there was a lull in the noise caused by the grinding, screaming ice and they could plainly hear Sahanderry's voice adjuring them to hasten. Roy raised his voice in a mighty shout in reply, using his fists for a trumpet, and tried to increase his pace, but stumbled at almost every step. However, the girl was possessed of marvellous strength and dragged him by sheer force toward the shore.

And soon they were at the base of the ice wall, which they were passing at a great rate. Sahanderry on the summit above them whirled a coil about his head, then throwing it away from him, it straightened itself out and an end fell at Kasba's feet. It was the clapmatch line which belonged to the sled. Quickly the girl caught up the end and tied it round Roy's waist. But, divining her intention, he caught hold of her and despite her struggles would not let her go. The boy and man began to pull upon the line.

The foundations of the ice wall were being undermined by the rushing water and it swayed threateningly. Would it hold a little longer?

The man and boy strained on the line, and half-climbing, half-scrambling, the two were dragged together to the top of first one ice block, then another.

They were now out of danger from the ice floes, but the structure they were on was trembling and threatening to collapse, and desperately they strove to gain the summit before it should topple upon them.

Perceiving the danger, Sahanderry and the boy David tugged on the line with every ounce of their strength, and Roy, who clung with a deadly grasp to the girl, was pulled violently to the top, and as he came the girl was dragged up with him. Once there the whole party lost no time in precipitating themselves down on the other side, and before long were safe ashore, nor were they a moment too soon; for they had scarcely left the ice before the entire wall swayed slowly over and toppled into the river with a thundering crash that sent a painful thrill through each one of them.

"Thank God we are saved!" cried the girl breathlessly.

"Amen!" said Sahanderry solemnly, lifting his hat and reverently bowing his head, an action which was closely imitated by David. Roy nodded, but said nothing. He was too exhausted for words and was again shivering violently. Kasba silently pointed this out to Sahanderry, who at once turned his attention to building a shelter in the form of a brushwood camp, while David made a huge fire, which was no sooner lighted than Roy threw himself down beside it, and almost immediately clouds of steam rose from his wet clothing.

Soon they were all enjoying the warmth of the blaze. They had not eaten since early morning, but

after such a day of fatigue and excitement they all felt more inclined for rest than food. On comparing notes it was found that, except for an overpowering fatigue, a severe wetting and minor cuts and bruises, none of them were any the worse for their nerve-racking adventure. But they would not go on farther that day—that was of course out of the question. Later in the evening Roy decided to spend a few days on the spot, and in the end determined on remaining there altogether. For he thought the situation over carefully, and decided that with the break-up of the river spring had come in earnest. Nature was awaking once more from her heavy sleep in the long winter night.

The renovation of creation in spring is, I think, more impressive in the Far North than in any other part of the world, on account of the greater contrast with what has gone before.

This river, Roy argued, would serve their purpose as well as the one they had had in mind on leaving Fort Future. So Sahanderry was told to make a house in the vicinity.

Despite their desperate situation Roy could not help smiling when he gave the order, for there was practically no building material at hand. Nevertheless Sahanderry soon accomplished his task. The walls were of small logs, the roof of several layers of parchments (undressed deerskins), which they had brought with them, stretched to the tightness of a drumhead and overlaid with turf. A hole cut in one of the walls was, in the absence of glass, covered with

a piece of cotton and formed a window. The door was made of boards which had been chopped with infinite labor from logs. There was no chimney, nor was it required, as, in the absence of a stove, the cooking would have to be done outside.

And in this primitive dwelling Roy Thursby decided to drag out his monotonous existence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN INGENIOUS EXPEDIENT.

One morning a few weeks later the sun rose quickly over the horizon, as if it had overslept and was hurrying to make up lost time. Its angry crimson face threw a lurid glow across the sky, like the reflection of some mighty conflagration.

A small coast-boat, dancing on the waves of a flood-tide, tugged impatiently at her anchor, while a strong south wind sportively dashed an occasional drenching spray across her deck, much to the discomfort of a number of men lying there.

At length one of these recumbent figures rose slowly to his feet and scanned the horizon with a sailor's eye. It was our old friend George Hopkins. He stood for a moment staring at the crimson sunrise, then touched the nearest sleeper with his foot. "*At-tee, Oulybuck, A-no-ee pi-chi-ak* (Now, Oulybuck, it is a fair wind)," he said.

The Eskimo addressed threw back his blankets with a sleepy ejaculation, rose to his knees and then to his feet, gazing around him the while. When his eye encountered the threatening sky he uttered a disapproving grunt.

One by one four other Eskimos crawled from under their blankets, yawned, stretched themselves, and scowled at the approaching storm.

In a few minutes the little anchor was up and the boat was speeding on her way north. Hopkins perched himself in the stern to steer while the Eskimos dropped into positions of ease, awaiting orders.

Soon the wind freshened and the sea began to dance. As the boat cut her way through the billows a head was poked out from an improvised cabin amidships. It was the head of a man well on in years, with grey hair and a long grey beard. His keen blue eyes scanned the heavens, noted the direction of the wind, then turned to the steersman.

"Fair wind, eh! George?" he remarked.

Hopkins glanced at the lowering clouds, then with dubious cheerfulness, he replied: "Yes, but we'll have bad weather before long."

"Let us hope you are mistaken," returned the other, withdrawing his head.

In a few minutes he reappeared fully attired. It was Chief Factor McLeod, accompanied by his daughter Lena and his nephew Frank, and on his way to inspect Fort Future.

Shortly after Mr. McLeod's appearance the sound of girlish laughter, mingled with the protesting voice of a man, proceeded from the cabin. There was the noise of a scuffle, then a young woman burst out and sprang behind the Factor. As she stood there, her face alive with mischievous laughter, her eyes sparkling with merriment, her bosom heaving with the exertions of her playful struggle, she was the picture of a bonny, saucy, Scottish maiden.

Soon a fresh, boyish face appeared in the cabin doorway.

"Look here, Uncle," growled the young fellow, a little sulkily, "I wish you would keep that daughter of yours in order. She is more mischievous than a monkey. Yes, a monkey, miss," he added severely, for the girl was making grimaces at him from behind her father's back. "She can't leave me alone five minutes, sir."

"Lena! Lena!" admonished Mr. McLeod with a smile and a look of deep affection. "Will you never act as a grown-up young lady should?"

The girl laughed derisively at her cousin, then, abruptly turning her back, she caught her father's arm and pulled him to the side of the boat. As they gazed over the turbulent waters, a low, hoarse roar made itself heard above the noise of dashing waves. The expected gale was upon them. A damp column of cold air struck the boat, bellying out the canvas with a jerk, and wrenching the yielding mass, until it bowed heavily over before the shock.

The mainsail was quickly dropped and the boat righted herself. Sluggishly great waves buffeted her, causing her to stagger when they struck.

Presently the gale became furious, fully justifying Hopkins' prognostications. The sea was so rough that the boat was in great danger of being smashed by the sheer weight of water hurled against her side. But they were compelled to go on, however terrible the storm might be, for the wind had swerved round to the west and this, with the tide on the ebb, pre-

vented them running close-in to anchor in one of the numerous rivers along the coast. The boat was fast being carried out to sea, the land was becoming a thin black line in the far distance, and shortly all trace of it was lost to sight.

Perceiving their peril, Hopkins gave the helm to a trusty lieutenant and stumbled forward to speak to the Chief Factor, who was standing there alone. He had long since sent Lena to the cabin and now stood with his arm twined around a back-stay, strung to the tension of a harpstring, and his eyes sparkling with excitement as the little craft beneath him tossed and rolled and tore along. His drenched hair and beard were flying back from his face, which was streaming with salt water.

"She's not holding her own against the combined fury of wind and tide," he cried at Hopkins' approach.

"We're being carried out to sea, sir," declared George with some disgust. Just then a tremendous sea caught the boat and she gave a lurch, throwing him violently down. The plunging masses of water made her quiver to her keel, and threatened to swamp her, but digging her nose into the great waves she staggered on.

"Thank God we are still afloat," murmured Mr. McLeod. "Another shock like that and it will be all up with us." Then turning to Hopkins he enquired whether he had been hurt in the fall.

Hopkins shook his head.

"We are being carried out to sea, you say, but what can we do?" questioned the Factor.

"We can drop anchor, and try to ride it out, sir."

The Factor shook his head. "The seas would smash us," he said.

George nodded. "Then we must hoist the mainsail again. I'm afraid she won't carry it, but we can try. There's a shoal that runs from a point of land ahead of us; if we can make that we'll anchor in the lee of it."

"All right! Hoist your mainsail, then. But have it close reefed."

Staggering back to the stern, Hopkins resumed charge of the rudder and the mainsail was reefed and hoisted, but with great difficulty, for the wind, catching the spreading canvas, flapped it with a report like a gun-shot, threatening to snatch it away. The extra sail caused the boat to heel over alarmingly.

A smothered ejaculation of concern came from the cabin and soon Lena appeared, enveloped in a serviceable macintosh. Perceiving that she was alone the Factor hastened to assist her to a position of safety. Meanwhile Hopkins was straining his eyes in search of land. He was feeling very uneasy, for it seemed impossible that the boat could much longer resist the perpetual attack of the waves. The point at issue was simply—would the coast-boat last till they reached a place where they could anchor, or would she be swamped or smashed to pieces before they reached a place of safety?

At length there was a shout from an Eskimo lookout in the bow.

"*Nuna!* (land)" he cried.

"*Ninne? Ninne?* (where? where?)" asked the other Eskimos in chorus.

"*Na-nee!* (there)" cried the bowsman, pointing almost straight ahead.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mr. McLeod, with a long sigh of relief, while Hopkins' face cleared, and the Eskimos lost their anxious looks, for right ahead of them was a small island of sand, over which the waves broke in rapid succession. It was the shoal of which Hopkins had spoken, and for which they had been so anxiously looking.

Their jubilation was shortlived, however, for they had scarcely got the anchor ready before the boat struck something under water with a terrible thud and remained fast. The jerk caused by the sudden stoppage threw the men off their feet, and snapped the mainmast short at the shaft, carrying the sail and gear overboard. The boat heeled over, great waves dashed into her and in an instant she was full of water.

Quick of action, the Chief Factor caught Lena about the waist and hoisted her to the top of the cabin, then, scrambling up himself, he signaled to the others to do likewise. The roaring of the surf, breaking over the small island, drowned all other noises.

Turning to Hopkins and forming a trumpet with his hands, the Factor endeavored to make himself heard. "Tide's going out," he shouted. "Shoal will dry . . . may walk ashore . . . if boat will only last till then."

Hopkins' lips moved in answer but his words were carried away by the wind.

For two hours the group crouched miserably upon the cabin, clutching at anything within reach to save being washed away by the great volumes of water that poured over them. Lashed by the wind, and drenched to the skin, they waited for the tide to ebb and leave the boat high and dry upon the shoal. The tempest continued with unabated fury, but the little island grew larger every minute.

Gradually the billows receded from the boat. They then discovered that Hopkins had run her on a part of a shoal which extended to a great distance under water at high tide.

At length the shipwrecked party were able to drop over the boat's side to the sand beneath, and walk to the prominence of the sandy island, where for a time, at least, they would be safe.

Calling Hopkins aside, the Factor attempted to prepare for eventualities. But it was only by turning their backs to the wind that they were able to distinguish what was said.

"Hopkins," Mr. McLeod began, "It is necessary that we should discover if there is any means of leaving this shoal before the tide turns."

"Yes, sir," replied George, "and the sooner the better."

"But it will necessitate an exploration of that part of the shoal," said the Chief Factor, indicating the part nearest the mainland, "and that is still under water."

"I am ready, sir."

"Yes, George, I know you are always ready to do your duty, but you cannot go alone. We will go together. I must see for myself. My nephew and daughter will remain with the Eskimos. You will tell the Eskimos to stay near them till we return."

Hopkins instructed the Eskimos who straightway grouped themselves near by.

Meanwhile Mr. McLeod was informing Lena of the proposed reconnaissance. Embracing her father, the girl urged him not to risk himself unnecessarily. The Factor promised to be as prudent as possible, then called Hopkins and they set out.

It was with the greatest difficulty that they faced the wind, but struggling desperately and unceasingly, they crept along. After an extremely difficult and laborious journey they arrived at the other end of the island, or shoal, and to their dismay found it was divided from the mainland by a large bay of water, which the wind was lashing into furious waves.

Taking off his l'Assumtion belt and tying a stone in one end of it, Hopkins lowered it into the water to ascertain the depth, but was unable to touch bottom. At this, his face lengthened and the Factor, who had been closely watching him, gave a groan of dismay, for their hopes of escape by wading ashore were destroyed.

"Nothing but a raft can save us now," said George dejectedly.

The other shook his head dubiously. He was turning his footsteps sorrowfully backwards when a

great shout from his companion brought him to a halt. Turning quickly, he discovered Hopkins wildly gesticulating toward a point of land in the far distance, and looking in that direction, he first saw something infinitely small dancing upon the waters, then several small objects which speedily followed it. He turned to his companion for information.

"Eskimos," explained Hopkins in answer to the other's look of puzzled enquiry. "They've lashed their *ka-yaks* (parchment canoes) together and are coming to help us. See," he added excitedly, pointing to the far-off land, "they're camped over there to hunt *nitchuk* (seal)."

The Factor turned his eyes to the spot indicated by his companion and after close scrutiny made out several tiny white objects dotted about the sand—these were tents.

Chief Factor McLeod had witnessed many daring feats, but never one to compare with this which the Eskimos were attempting. The waves dashed threateningly over the *ka-yaks,* but seemed powerless to harm the fragile crafts, which floated with the buoyancy of cork. At times waves larger than their fellows caught them, and, carrying them up on their towering crests appeared to capsize them, but a few strokes of the *pou-tik* (paddle) seemed to right them again.

As the Eskimos drew nearer, the Factor could see how skillful they really were, with what wonderful precision they handled the *ka-yaks,* which, in this instance were lashed together in threes, and any

doubts he might have had about their effecting a rescue by this ingenious expedient were immediately dispelled. Turning, he gave a joyful shout, which, carried along on the wind, was plainly heard by the anxiously waiting party at the other end of the island. These instantly started to come to him. The Eskimos staggered on sturdily, but Lena found it difficult to force herself forward against the tempest; the wind caught her garments and pressed her backwards, threatening to throw her off her feet. It was only by desperately clinging to her cousin's arm that she was able to keep her balance and walk slowly on.

Perceiving her predicament the Factor went to the rescue, and with the wind at his back he scudded along and was soon by her side. He managed, by shouting his loudest, to make her hear the broken sentences.

"Eskimos . . . encamped . . . neck of land . . . coming . . . *ka-yaks* . . . . rescue us . . . ."

By the time they had reached the further end of the island, the *ka-yaks* were lying high and dry upon the sand and the Eskimo strangers grouped together waiting to greet them.

With quaint gestures, the Factor endeavored to thank them for coming to the rescue of himself and party.

The intrepid Eskimos received phlegmatically the earnest expressions of gratitude.

They nodded deliberately, glanced at the ebbing tide, then walked to the *ka-yaks* where they stood significantly waiting.

Divining from their behavior that they were anxious to start before the tide turned, which, flowing against the wind would make a rougher and angrier sea than ever, Mr. McLeod lost no more time, but straightway led Lena to the *ka-yaks*. A trio were now put on the water and Lena was lifted into the middle one. Then an Eskimo stepped quickly into each of the outside *ka-yaks* and a start was made for the shore. The Factor watched the men paddle desperately for a few moments, then walked quickly to where a set of *ka-yaks* was waiting for him. And in a very little while the whole number of frail craft were on the water, battling against wind and waves, which had providentially lessened in violence.

After an hour or so of arduous paddling the *ka-yak* containing Lena touched the shore and the girl was lifted unceremoniously in a pair of malodorous arms and carried to dry land.

Then at intervals others of the shipwrecked crew arrived, all very wet, very cold, and very stiff from sitting in such cramped positions, and painfully they walked up to a large fire which the Eskimo women had kindled.

After such strenuous efforts, the thoughts of the Eskimo rescuers turned to a meal, and taking their shipwrecked comrades with them, they strolled to where several large kettles hung suspended over as many fires. Then the men seated themselves in a

circle, the women arranging themselves in another at some little distance from them.

Two large, oblong, wooden dishes, one for each group, were brought from the fires and their contents emptied upon the ground. This was the signal for a mad rush. The men displayed remarkable agility as they scrambled with hearty laughter for the sickly mess—boiled seal meat—while screams from the group of women told that excitement was likewise rife in their midst. Procuring as much as they could hold in both hands, they retired to their former positions in the circle and with the aid of long, murderous-looking knives, wolfishly devoured their portions—cramming their mouths to the utmost extent and cutting off the remainder uncomfortably close to their flat noses and chins.

When all the solids had disappeared, liquids were brought on. Large kettles containing the water in which the meat had been boiled were carried into the centre of the two groups, which once more became struggling masses of humanity, all of them endeavoring to dip a can or a mug into the kettles at one and the same time. The uproar gradually subsided as each person retired to his or her place, chuckling over a mug of greasy liquid.

This simple but animated repast at an end, the Eskimos settled themselves for a deliberate smoke.

Meanwhile the wants of the Chief Factor and party had been cared for by the resourceful Hopkins, and they were glad to be able, at least for a little time, to rest and be thankful. But their respite was

of short duration. Fate had chosen that, at that time and place, they should learn of the awful catastrophe at Fort Future and the harrowing news was travelling fast toward them in the person of Acpą, who was on his way with a party of Eskimos in a whaleboat to take charge of the ruins of the Company's property at Fort Future in compliance with Kasba's request, and was on the lookout for a suitable spot to put ashore and camp. Perceiving Eskimo tents dotted along the point of land, those in the boat quickly dropped the sail and pulled to the shore.

"Why, it's Acpa!" declared George Hopkins, greatly astonished, as the old Eskimo stepped out of the boat. "Wonder what he's doing here," and with that he strolled down to greet the old fellow, little dreaming what terrible news he would bring back.

CHAPTER XIX.

KASBA'S SACRIFICE.

Meanwhile Roy Thursby dragged out a miserable existence in the little hut on the bank of the river. Day by day his frame of mind grew more and more despondent and morbid. Everything worth while seemed at an end. Except that at certain times there was the sound of his companions' movements, and at others only a dreadful stillness for long days together, all "Time" was alike to him; to-day the same as yesterday and to-morrow but a repetition of to-day. He was merely a machine, going through the daily routine of getting up and lying down, eating and drinking, with automatic precision, and the outgoings and incomings of the male members of his party marked the period for each of these acts. It was one long, dreary monotony. He had long since lost count of the days. He was conscious that the occupations of his companions varied as the season wore on and that, in consequence, his diet changed from venison to fish, varied with the flesh of migratory birds, but this interested him not at all. He had long lost all pleasure in food—just eating and drinking to keep the machine going, that was all. A pathetic indifference to everything possessed him. He sat for hours without uttering a word, and when he spoke it was

always in monosyllables, and an awed, unnatural silence lay over the house from morn till night, for, as if by tacit consent, the three Indians carried their conversation to the outside of the house.

Thus weeks passed. Sahanderry and David hunted or fished and did the heavier chores. Kasba dressed and smoked deerskins to make into moccasins, made and mended the clothes of herself and companions, cooked the meals and attended to a hundred and one other things.

One day the girl brought Roy his dinner as usual. It was a piece of salmon, the first they had caught. Setting the plate before him, she retired to a seat and took up a garment which required mending. Slowly, and with the indifference of a man without an appetite Roy lifted the food to his mouth, turned it on his tongue, sat a moment as if struck by a sudden thought, and then got unsteadily to his feet, dropping the fork as he arose. He stood a moment like one suddenly awakened from a deep sleep, then: "This is salmon," he said with a slight inflection as of interest in his voice.

At the sound of his words Kasba started forward, letting the garment fall to the ground. Her lips were parted, her eyes sparkled. This sudden interest might portend a break-up in Roy's apathy, and to the girl it was as the clear sunshine after days of dismal gloom.

"Yes, Bekothrie," she answered as soon as emotion would permit her to speak. "We caught the first yesterday."

"Then this is the middle of July," he said thoughtfully.

"Yes," said the girl, divining the trend of his thoughts.

Roy breathed hard and his lips moved; but he dropped slowly back to his seat without further speech.

The girl stood with parted lips watching him expectantly, then, finding he had nothing more to say, and that he seemed fully occupied with his thoughts, she breathed a little disappointed sigh, took up the dropped garment and went patiently on with her sewing. The stitch, stitch of her needle and the song of the busy mosquitoes were the only sounds.

From that time Roy was as one laboring under some suppressed excitement, uneasy, as if waiting for something to happen and dreading while desiring it. He became restless and impatient to a large degree and as Kasba went quietly about her household affairs, she frequently paused to blink away salt tears, called to her eyes by the sight of his misery. The once hulking big fellow was but the shadow of his former self. Great rings showed round his eyes, his face was becoming more and more haggard and drawn, his cheekbones protruded sharply. Perceiving that he was rapidly becoming ill and divining the cause, she timidly essayed a proposal. She would go back to Fort Future and by secretly watching discover when *Bekothrie nithee* (the far-away master, in this case Mr. McLeod), came. But Roy would not hear of this, though as the time for Mr. McLeod's

arrival at Fort Future drew near he could scarcely contain himself.

He fancied the scene; the dismantled Fort, the grey-haired Chief Factor sorrowfully supporting Lena, sobbing out her heart over what she believed to be his grave. He could hear her heart-breaking cries as she bewailed his loss; hear the cold, tense voice of the Chief Factor swearing to be avenged on the perpetrator of the outrage and murder. Then Lena would be led on board and the boat would sail away. That would be the end. His mind would dwell upon this till his brain reeled, and he would put his hot hand up to his burning forehead as if to press back his thoughts.

Then one day by a process akin to telepathy he became aware that Lena was near. It was the very day Mr. McLeod's boat was wrecked and its occupants rescued by the Eskimos, and it happened that they were landed near where Roy had, as he thought, so securely hidden himself from all communication with his own kind. At first the poor fellow believed that his mind must be wandering. But the conviction that Lena was there, close at hand, grew stronger every minute, and at last he could contain himself no longer. He felt he must send to the coast to ascertain if anyone had lately landed, or he would go mad. Unwilling to trust the garrulous Sahanderry, he must perforce send Kasba. The girl was outside attending to the fire, he could hear her talking to David. He called to her, and almost instantly she was at his side, and in a few

words he explained what he wanted her to do. She smiled confidently. "Yes, Bekothrie," she said quietly, and without another word she made her preparation and at once started off for the coast, which was about a mile distant.

Arriving at her destination, she discovered the shipwrecked voyagers. From Roy's description she at once recognized them. The Factor was standing apart with Lena and her cousin. Overcome with feelings of bitter jealousy, she ventured dangerously near in order that she might better discern the features of her fortunate rival.

The grim expression of the Factor's countenance bore token of a severe determination of mind. Bitter sorrow for the tragic end of his promising, inordinately ambitious young friend mingled with the wrath he felt toward the perpetrator of the tragedy. He gazed with loving solicitude upon Lena, who sat in an attitude of great sorrow. The news had been a great shock to her. The bright, sunny expression had entirely disappeared and a pained, startled expression had come into her face. Her lips trembled as her father's hand fell lightly upon her head.

"Be brave, my little girl, for my sake," he pleaded brokenly. Then he walked to where Acpa was sitting, surrounded by a number of Eskimos.

Left alone with his cousin, Frank was in a dilemma; he knew not what to say. Lena's uncontrollable grief was extremely painful to witness, for he loved her.

At length he leaned over and gazed into the tear-

stained features, "Lena, my darling," he said, "do not grieve so."

There was a strange pleading in his manly voice. "It breaks my heart to see your distress. After all, it may be, it must be, some mistake. We shall yet find Roy Thursby and find him alive and well."

"It is kind of you to say so, Frank," said the girl in a mournfully sweet voice, "but there is no hope, can be no hope, for poor Roy."

"But, my dear Lena," began Frank, then glancing behind him, "I heard something moving," he added, partly to himself.

It was Kasba. Attracted by the sight of Lena's grief she had drawn quite close. Crouched down among the rocks she had heard, and the poor girl's despair made Kasba's warm, affectionate heart ache. The sorrow she herself had suffered, was still suffering, made her tenderly solicitous for another's misery. She stood with hands tightly clenched, battling with her own desires. She dreaded to speak, to tell Lena that her lover lived, for she well knew what the result would be. Yet she longed to comfort her.

The conflict raged fiercely. The issue at stake was all heaven and earth to her, for without Roy life would be blank indeed. Then why should she give him up? Then she remembered Roy's misery, that in his heart he was pining for the companionship of his own kind, and the inborn truth, the native generosity and candor, that always overruled every other element in her, conquered now. Girding herself to make a great sacrifice, she stepped into the open.

"*Bekothrie nithee!*" she cried in a tremulous voice.

Mr. McLeod turned sharply. Lena sprang to her feet expectant of she knew not what.

Then, nerving herself, Kasba spoke the words which would make her forever desolate: "Mr. Thursby is alive," she said.

With a cry of joy Lena ran swiftly to the brave girl.

"What do you mean?" she asked with feverish eagerness, holding the girl by the wrist. "Roy not dead?" Her voice broke.

"No, God performed a miracle for me." The girl spoke simply, fully believing what she said. "Mr. Thursby was dead for many hours," she explained, "then he came to himself." "But he is—" Kasba hesitated, fearing to speak the terrible truth.

Lena noticed the girl's hesitation and was alarmed at once. "Go on," she cried, clutching the girl's wrist hard. "Tell me, tell me quickly! Something has happened?" Her voice expressed the utmost anxiety.

"He is totally blind," said Kasba sadly. She spoke in the greatest distress.

Lena's face grew dead-white, she stood stiff and rigid, staring at the girl, quite dazed at the horror of the thing.

"Blind!" cried the Chief Factor who had come up. "How terribly horrible! Poor Roy! Ah!" He was just in time to catch his daughter, who uttered a short unnatural sound and reeled against him. But she did not lose consciousness and in a moment her strength returned.

"Let me go!" she cried, sobbing wildly and struggling in her father's arms. "Let me go to him, or I shall die!"

"You shall go, my child," said the Chief Factor soothingly. He glanced at Kasba, who nodded and stretched out her hand, that tiny brown hand, which small though it was, had pulled Roy out of the water.

"Come," she said simply, "I will take you to him."

Arriving at the hut Kasba stood aside to let Lena pass. "You will find him in there," she said. But Lena did not hear her, for she was already through the door.

As the door opened Roy started upright in an instant, conscious of the girl's presence in the room. Lena's eyes opened wide with horror at the sight of him, she started and drew slightly back, struck speechless by the fearful change in the splendidly vital figure.

There was a painful silence.

Roy stood with head thrust slightly forward in an attitude of listening intently,—in that attitude of concentrated expectancy of sounds peculiar to the totally blind; holding his breath to catch the slightest sound. He trembled all over with excitement. "Lena!" he cried, in a low, tense voice, though believing it impossible that she should be there. Then he swayed unsteadily.

Lena came forward to him quickly, and with a little cry, in which there was more of anguish than joy, her arms went about his neck.

Kasba had remained outside, but she could hear their voices and for a moment her heart stopped beating and her lips set tightly. She pressed one hand to her bosom, uttering a stifled wail like a wounded animal. The sacrifice had been great. She reeled and almost fell. Then she made a great effort, straightened herself and went and leaned against the hut, on the other side, away from the door, and covered her face with her hands. Then a feeling of utter loneliness fell upon her. She felt that something had been taken from her and given to another—something that was more to her than life.

She could still hear their voices. They were happy together, while she was outside alone. And so it would always be now. They would take Roy away and leave her behind, and she would see him no more. Then she heard footfalls, and one was Sahanderry's. He came and stood beside her. She could hear his sharp breathing. Then, in an impulse, she dropped her hands and gave them to him. "He is happy now," she said, a little bitterly. "Take me. It was my father's wish. I am yours."

Here ends the story of Kasba, and the chronicler makes apology for all that has been amiss in the telling of the events recorded, conscious that a better man could have done it better. Whether Kasba will ever come into another story the author himself cannot tell, nor does he know whether she will be welcome if she comes.